

NISKANEN C E N T E R

OPPORTUNITY BY DESIGN

HOW STATES TURN IMMIGRATION INTO ECONOMIC ADVANTAGE

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Executive summary

The American labor market is undergoing a profound structural transformation, driven by an aging population, rapid technological change, and persistent mismatches between worker skills and employer needs. In response, states have been modernizing their workforce systems to expand labor force participation, align education and training with evolving industry demands, and future-proof their economies. As part of these efforts, policymakers, the private sector, and civil society are increasingly recognizing immigrants as a vital yet underutilized segment of the labor force and harnessing their contributions as workers, entrepreneurs, and community leaders.

This paper synthesizes a 50-state review of policy activity from 2020–2024, revealing growing bipartisan momentum among states to increase immigrant participation in their workforces. Common measures include reducing credentialing and licensing barriers; expanding opportunities for English language learning and digital literacy; broadening access to workforce training and services; and enhancing other pathways to opportunity.

Drawing on innovative steps that states have taken, the paper presents a practical playbook of real-world examples and actionable strategies for developing skills-based workforce systems that effectively engage all work-eligible populations. In this way, the paper serves as a resource to help states tap underutilized talent and foster long-term economic growth and resilience.

I. Introduction

The American labor market is undergoing a profound transformation marked by demographic shifts, accelerating technological change, and persistent mismatches between worker skills and employer needs. These changes pose urgent challenges, but they also present a generational opportunity to expand workforce participation, modernize systems, and build a more resilient labor force, drawing on the inclusion of all eligible, working-age populations. States are navigating a new era of economic and workforce development.

Two core factors are at the center of this transformation. The first is a simple demographic fact: The American population is aging. As retirements accelerate and birth rates decline, workforce growth is slowing across all regions and sectors. Second, the rise of artificial intelligence, the increasing demand for care work and credentialed workers, and the digitalization of jobs are reshaping the skills required to thrive today and adapt as work and technology evolve.

In response, states have been altering their workforce strategies through policy reforms, programmatic innovation, and targeted investment. Their goals are to increase workforce participation, harness existing talent and train workers for future jobs, and recruit new workers both domestically and internationally. By addressing participation barriers and creating skills-based pathways, states have been responding to immediate labor market demands while laying the foundation for long-term growth and shared prosperity.

Expanding labor market participation is necessary, but it will not be sufficient to meet the scale of current and future workforce demand. Immigration will continue to be a vital engine of workforce growth and economic vitality. Immigrant workers, already indispensable to local economies, are increasingly included in states' strategies. They bring critical skills and entrepreneurial energy that sustain key industries and strengthen communities. Systemic barriers, however, have impeded states from realizing immigrants' full potential. These obstacles include restrictive licensing rules and fragmented credentialing processes; limited access to English-language instruction and workforce training and services; and digital divides. These are not only missed opportunities but also active constraints on state-level economic competitiveness.

This paper provides a roadmap for how states have responded to and shaped the future of work in light of profound labor market changes, concluding with a playbook of actionable strategies to optimize the participation of work-authorized immigrants. The state-level initiatives discussed in the paper encompass work-authorized immigrant populations, who comprise roughly 13 percent of the U.S. labor force. Because of their lawful status, immigrants who are authorized to work in the U.S. historically have not been subject to federal immigration enforcement activities.¹ These state-level initiatives reflect durable strategies that can help states build resilient workforces. Section II examines the structural forces reshaping the labor market: demographic shifts, evolving skill demands, and barriers to workforce participation. Section III explores the policy levers states are using to expand labor force participation, optimize existing talent, and recruit workers both domestically and internationally. Section IV highlights major state innovations and

¹ Stephanie Kramer and Jeffrey S. Passel, "What the Data Says about Immigrants in the U.S.," Pew Research Center, Aug. 21, 2025. This paper follows industry and U.S. government standards and uses the number of immigrants with lawful status to determine the population with work authorization. It [includes](#) permanent residents, nonimmigrants, and refugees and asylees who have not yet become permanent residents. Pew's estimate of "unauthorized" immigrants includes those with parole, pending asylum applications, and protection from deportation, such as individuals with Temporary Protected Status or DACA recipients. They have permission to live or work in the U.S. but their permission to stay in the country could change if immigration policy shifts, and so are not included in this paper's estimate of the work-authorized population. The [Center for Migration Studies](#) and the [Migration Policy Institute](#) follow similar [methodology](#) and [include](#) similar populations in estimates of the unauthorized population, as does the [federal government](#). According to Pew, in 2023 about 6 million immigrants had some kind of temporary legal protection and were included in the calculation of 14 million unauthorized immigrants. Pew estimates that about 250,000 immigrants are counted more than once.

activities from 2020–2024 that aimed to maximize the contributions of immigrants, including licensing and credentialing reforms; the use of virtual platforms and digital tools to increase access to English language learning, digital skills, and workforce training and services; and the rise of Offices of New Americans. Section V translates these insights into a policy playbook of actionable strategies encompassing licensing reform, digital literacy, inclusive training systems, and cross-sector collaboration. Section VI concludes with a vision for the future in which immigrant inclusion is not a special initiative but a central pillar of resilient, future-ready workforce systems.

Policies are most effective when they eliminate barriers that keep working-age populations from participating fully in the workforce and contributing to the economy. By ensuring that all individuals who are ready and able to work can do so, states are building durable labor systems and driving economic competitiveness.

II. A changing landscape: Structural shifts in the labor market

The American labor market stands at a demographic crossroads. Decades of declining birth rates and rising life expectancy have yielded an aging population that will create long-term structural strain. As more workers retire and fewer young people enter the workforce, states are confronting an urgent question: how to sustain economic growth with a shrinking working-age population. These demographic realities are not abstract projections — they are already unfolding, challenging states to find new strategies for expanding labor force participation and bolstering their talent pipelines. Alongside state efforts to engage underutilized workers, immigration is emerging as a critical tool to help states respond to the more profound demographic shifts that will define the next generation of economic vitality.²

A. Demographic pressures

Demographic shifts are fundamentally reshaping the American labor market. The U.S. is aging rapidly: By 2030, one in five Americans will be 65 or older, and by 2034, older adults will outnumber children under 18.³ Declining birth rates and increasing retirements mean that more people are leaving the workforce than entering it.⁴ Declining birth rates also affect the youth pipeline; the number of high school graduates is projected to peak in 2025 and then decline annually, dropping by 13 percent by 2041.⁵

As a result, states are facing unprecedented pressure to grow their labor pools to sustain economic growth and meet employer demand.⁶ Many have taken steps to increase labor force participation among all working-age individuals, including immigrants authorized to work in the United States. Doing so not only supports a more productive economy, but also expands opportunities for all people to contribute meaningfully to their

2 U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, “[Chapter 2 – Eligibility Requirements](#),” USCIS Policy Manual, Volume 10 (Employment Authorization), Part A. For this paper, “immigrant” refers to a foreign-born national, born to non-U.S. citizen parents, who resides in the U.S. It encompasses naturalized citizens, green card holders, resettled refugees, asylees, Special Immigrant Visa holders, individuals holding temporary (non-immigrant) status, and undocumented immigrants. The paper draws on data from multiple U.S. agencies, which use “foreign born,” and uses “immigrant” interchangeably with “foreign born.” Some stakeholders use the term New American. The paper focuses on immigrants who are eligible for work authorization and/or have employment authorization.

3 Jonathan Vespa et al., [Demographic Turning Points for the United States: Population Projections for 2020 to 2060](#), Current Population Reports, P25-1144 (U.S. Census Bureau, March 2018, revised Feb. 2020).

4 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, “[U.S. Fertility Rate Drops to Another Historic Low](#),” April 25, 2024; Brady E. Hamilton et al., [Births: Provisional Data for 2023](#), NCHS Vital Statistics Rapid Release Report no. 35 (Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics, April 25, 2024).

5 P. Lane et al., [Knocking at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates](#) (Boulder, CO: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, Dec. 2024). While high school graduation rates have improved, the shrinking number of youth means fewer total graduates.

6 U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, “[Employment Projections — 2024–2034](#),” Aug. 28, 2025.

communities and local economies.

While efforts to expand labor force participation are essential, they are insufficient on their own. The demographic math is inescapable: Without a meaningful increase in net immigration, the U.S. population is projected to begin shrinking by 2033, and with it, the size of the workforce will decline.⁷ Immigration is already the primary driver of U.S. population growth and workforce expansion.⁸ Population decline cannot be rapidly reversed through a sudden rise in birth rates.⁹ Continued and expanded immigration is not a silver bullet, but it is indispensable to offsetting long-term demographic and economic pressures.

B. Skills gaps and economic shifts

Beyond demographic change, states are grappling with a persistent mismatch between the skills workers have and the skills employers need.¹⁰ This gap is widening as the economy evolves.

By 2031, 72 percent of jobs are expected to require some form of postsecondary education and/or training.¹¹ Yet, as of 2022, only 62 percent of Americans had attained that level of education.¹² The sectors with the highest rates of growth – healthcare, STEM, community services, and professional occupations – require education, training, and credentials that many current workers lack.¹³ Home health and personal care aides are projected to add more new jobs than any other occupation over the next decade, driven by an aging population and a growing need for support in chronic and behavioral healthcare.¹⁴ The direct care workforce, in particular, is already facing acute demand.¹⁵

Simultaneously, 39 percent of core job skills are projected to change by 2030, driven by advances in artificial intelligence, automation, and the digitalization of work.¹⁶ Closing skill gaps will require flexible training in core technological competencies and transferrable skills such as critical thinking, communication, adaptability, and teamwork that are essential in technology-driven jobs.

7 Mike Schnieder, “[US Population Projections Shrink from Last Year because of Declining Birth Rates, Less Immigration](#),” AP News, Jan. 15, 2025; Congressional Budget Office, [The Demographic Outlook: 2025 to 2055](#) (Washington, D.C.: CBO, Jan. 2025).

8 U.S. Census Bureau, “[Net International Migration Drives Highest U.S. Population Growth in Decades](#),” Dec. 19, 2024; William H. Frey, “[Immigration Drives the Nation’s Healthy Post-Pandemic Population Growth, New Census Data Show](#),” Brookings Institution, Jan. 6, 2025.

9 Natalia V. Bhattacharjee and Austin Schumacher, “Global Fertility in 204 Countries and Territories, 1950-2021, with Forecasts to 2100: A Comprehensive Demographic Analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2021,” *The Lancet* 403, no. 10440 (May 18, 2024): 2057-2099; Anu Madgavkar et al., [Dependency and Depopulation? Confronting the Consequences of a New Demographic Reality](#) (San Francisco: McKInsey Global Institute, Jan. 2025); Tomáš Sobotka et al., “[Policy Responses to Low Fertility: How Effective Are They?](#)” Working Paper No. 1, Technical Division, Population & Development Branch, United Nations Population Fund, May 2019.

10 Jeff Strohl et al., [The Great Misalignment: Addressing the Mismatch between the Supply of Certificates and Associate’s Degrees and the Future Demand for Workers in 565 U.S. Labor Markets](#) (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2024); David H. Bradley et al., [Skills Gaps: A Review of Underlying Concepts and Evidence](#), Congressional Research Service Report No. RF7509 (Washington, D.C.: CRS, March 31, 2022).

11 Anthony P. Carnevale et al., [After Everything: Projections of Jobs, Education, and Training Requirements through 2031](#) (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University, Center on Education and the Workforce, 2023).

12 U.S. Census Bureau, “[Census Bureau Releases New Educational Attainment Data](#),” Feb. 16, 2023.

13 Carnevale et al., [After Everything](#).

14 Javier Colato et al., “[Industry and Occupational Employment Projections Overview and Highlights, 2023-33](#),” *Monthly Labor Review*, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Nov. 2024.

15 Barbara Lyons and Molly O’Malley Watts, “[Addressing the Shortage of Direct Care Workers: Insights from Seven States](#),” *The Commonwealth Fund*, March 19, 2024.

16 World Economic Forum, [The Future of Jobs Report 2025](#) (Switzerland: World Economic Forum, Jan. 7, 2025).

C. Structural barriers to workforce participation

Even when individuals are ready to work and possess the necessary skills and experience, structural barriers often prevent them from fully participating in the labor market.¹⁷ For many workers, including immigrants, obstacles such as unaffordable childcare, housing shortages, inadequate transportation, job-quality concerns, systemic exclusions in licensing systems, and barriers to education and workforce systems suppress both individual opportunity and broader economic productivity.¹⁸ Barriers to workforce participation create a cascade effect of skill gaps and lost economic potential given that workers who are underemployed after college experience less mobility, lower wages, and reduced productivity.¹⁹

Childcare remains one of the most persistent and costly barriers to workforce participation.²⁰ Between 2020 and 2024, childcare costs rose by 29 percent, outpacing inflation.²¹ Over 40 percent of families report difficulty affording care, with women disproportionately affected by the caregiving burden.²² The challenges of securing care for children under the age of three alone cost the U.S. economy an estimated \$122 billion annually in lost wages, productivity, and tax revenue.²³ Other caregiving responsibilities or health needs further limit participation.²⁴ These burdens are even more acute for low-income families and immigrants, who often lack access to culturally responsive childcare, other services, or flexible work arrangements.²⁵

Access to stable, affordable housing near job centers also remains a significant challenge. In high-demand regions, housing shortages and rising rents limit mobility and constrain job matching. In rural and suburban areas, limited public transit compounds these challenges.²⁶ For individuals without a car or a driver's license, driving to work is not feasible, effectively excluding them from regional labor markets.²⁷

Even when jobs are available, many frontline roles offer low wages, inflexible schedules, limited benefits, and few pathways for advancement.²⁸ These conditions discourage participation and lead to increased turnover.²⁹ In critical sectors such as healthcare, where demand continues to grow rapidly, employers' failure to

17 William M. Rodgers III and Nishesh Chalise, "[Barriers to Participation in the Labor Force: A Primer](#)," Bridges, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, vol. 2, May 24, 2023; Kelly D. Edmiston, "[Why Aren't More People Working in Low- and Moderate-Income Areas?](#)" Economic Review, Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, Jan. 1, 2020, 41–72.

18 Eleanor Krause and Isabel V. Sawhill, "[What We Know and Don't Know about Declining Labor Force Participation: A Review](#)," Brookings Institution, May 17, 2017.

19 Burning Glass Technologies and Strada Institute for the Future of Work, [The Permanent Detour: Underemployment's Long-Term Effects on the Careers of College Grads](#) (Boston: Burning Glass Technologies, May 2018).

20 Stephanie Ferguson Melhorn, "[Understanding America's Labor Shortage: The Scarce and Costly Childcare Issue](#)," U.S. Chamber of Commerce, June 26, 2024; Georgia Poyatzis and Gretchen Livingston, "[NEW DATA: Childcare Costs Remain an Almost Prohibitive Expense](#)," U.S. Department of Labor, Nov. 19, 2024.

21 Child Care Aware of America, [Child Care in America: 2024 Price & Supply](#) (May 2025).

22 Kyle Ross and Kennedy Andara, "[Child Care Expenses Push an Estimated 134,000 Families into Poverty Each Year](#)," Center for American Progress, Oct. 31, 2024.

23 First Five Years Fund, "[How a Lack of Affordable Child Care Impacts the Economy](#)," March 13, 2025.

24 Ben Gitis and Emily Wielk, "[Barriers to Work: A Recent BPC-Artemis Survey of Non-Working Americans and the Need for Paid Family and Medical Leave](#)," Bipartisan Policy Center, Sept. 1, 2023.

25 Upwardly Global, "[How to Advance Immigrant Women's Access to Childcare: Policy Brief](#)," Feb. 15, 2024.

26 Edmiston, "[Why Aren't More People Working?](#)"

27 Joseph Mengedoth, "[Transportation Access as a Barrier to Work](#)," Econ Focus, Fourth Quarter 2023, District Digest, Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond.

28 Tony Payan et al., [Reduce Health Care Labor Shortages by Recruiting Skilled Immigrants](#) (Houston: Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy, Nov. 6, 2024); Swathi Bhaskaran et al., "[Bridging the Advancement Gap: What Frontline Employees Want—and What Employers Think They Want](#)," McKinsey & Company, July 21, 2022; Amanda Bergson-Shilcock and Lindsey Reichlin Cruse, [Making Care Jobs Good Jobs](#) (Oct. 2025).

29 Gitis and Wielk, "[Barriers to Work](#)."

improve compensation, provide career ladders, or address poor working conditions contributes to chronic staffing shortages and high burnout.³⁰

In addition to the structural barriers that constrain many U.S.-born workers, many immigrants face a distinct set of barriers that further limit their ability to fully contribute to the economy, despite having the skills, motivation, and legal authorization to do so.³¹

One of the most pressing challenges is underemployment among high-skilled immigrants. Approximately 2 million immigrants with advanced training and professional experience are working in jobs that are far below their qualifications, primarily due to burdensome credentialing requirements and complex occupational licensing systems.³² These inefficiencies are costly, resulting in an estimated \$40 billion in lost wages and \$10 billion in unrealized tax revenue each year.³³ In healthcare alone, immigrant workers represent at least 18 percent of healthcare professionals.³⁴ Yet, there are about 270,000 underutilized immigrant healthcare workers in the United States – that is, people who are not working in jobs that draw on their full skills and abilities.³⁵

English-language access presents another significant barrier. Proficiency in English is often a prerequisite for accessing job opportunities, advancing in one's career, and participating in workforce training programs. However, English-language instruction through adult education programs meets only about 2 percent of the national demand.³⁶ This gap has real consequences: Limited English proficiency is a leading driver of underemployment, particularly among highly skilled immigrants.³⁷ Expanding high-quality, career-focused English instruction, particularly in essential industries and community-facing roles, is crucial to enabling more comprehensive inclusion in the labor market. In addition, language accessibility in government and public spaces is crucial for full participation in the community, the delivery of eligible services and benefits, and establishing a sense of belonging.³⁸

Workforce systems, too, often fail to meet the needs of immigrant populations. Although nearly 10 percent of people in the U.S. workforce have limited English skills, only 1.5 percent of adults served by the public workforce system's training programs have "limited English proficiency," indicating that too few people with

30 Megan Ayala and Isabella Lucy, "[The Pandemic Unemployed Survey: Why Americans Are Staying out of the Workforce](#)," U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Oct. 27, 2022; Cassandra Zimmer, "[Immigration as a Solution to Healthcare Workforce Shortages](#)," Niskanen Center, Dec. 17, 2024.

31 M. Pivovarov and Jeanne M. Powers, "[Do Immigrants Experience Labor Market Mismatch? New Evidence from the U.S. PIAAC](#)," Large-scale Assessments in Education 10, Article number 9 (2022).

32 Jeanne Batalova and Michael Fix, "[Leaving Money on the Table: The Persistence of Brain Waste among College-Educated Immigrants](#)," (Washington, D.C.: Migration Policy Institute, June 8, 2021); U.S. Department of Education, "[Recognition of Foreign Qualifications](#)," accessed 2025; U.S. Department of Education, "[Professional Licensure](#)."

33 Jeanne Batalova et al., [Untapped Talent: The Costs of Brain Waste among Highly Skilled Immigrants in the United States](#) (Washington, D.C.: Migration Policy Institute, New American Economy, and World Education Services, Dec. 2016).

34 Jeanne Batalova, "[Immigrant Health-Care Workers in the United States](#)," Migration Policy Institute, April 7, 2023.

35 Jeanne Batalova and Michael Fix, "[As U.S. Health-Care System Buckles under Pandemic, Immigrant & Refugee Professionals Could Represent a Critical Resource](#)," Migration Policy Institute, April 2020; Jeanne Batalova et al., "[The Integration of Immigrant Health Professionals: Looking beyond the COVID-19 Crisis](#)," Migration Policy Institute, April 2021.

36 Jacob Hofstetter and Margie McHugh, "[Leveraging Data to Ensure Equitable and Effective Adult Skills Programming for Immigrants](#)," (Washington, D.C.: Migration Policy Institute, Oct. 2023), 15.

37 Batalova et al., [Untapped Talent](#).

38 Jacob Hofstetter and Alexis Fintland, [Behind the Scenes: Mapping How State and Local Governments Implement Language Access Measures](#) (Washington, D.C.: Migration Policy Institute, 2025).

limited English skills are able to receive federally funded job training.³⁹ Many workforce training programs are not designed for language learners with lower proficiency, nor are they structured to support skilled immigrants' reentry into professional careers. As a result, immigrants are dramatically underserved, leaving vital talent untapped and workforce development efforts incomplete.

In addition, although career services have been proven to help people find employment more quickly, publicly funded American Job Centers have struggled to effectively serve jobseekers who are English language learners.⁴⁰ Lack of multilingual materials, interpretation services, and effective community outreach limits access.

Access to postsecondary education presents yet another barrier. Immigrants can be excluded from eligibility for in-state tuition or federal or state financial aid depending on their specific type of immigration status, and they often lack accurate, accessible guidance and support needed to attend college and complete their education.⁴¹ These barriers can close off pathways to the credentials increasingly required in the job market, perpetuating cycles of underemployment and missed opportunity.⁴²

The rise of digital and AI-driven work environments is also creating new forms of exclusion. As employers increasingly seek tech-savvy workers, immigrants often face a dual disadvantage: limited access to digital devices and broadband, and fewer opportunities to develop digital skills in formal settings and acquire AI literacy.⁴³ These gaps exacerbate existing barriers, making it more challenging to participate in training, search for jobs, or advance in one's career.

Finally, access to social capital through professional networks, mentorships, and informal guidance is often limited for immigrant workers.⁴⁴ These relationships are essential to navigating labor markets, understanding workplace culture, and seizing advancement opportunities. Without these connections, even highly qualified individuals can struggle to find employment that matches their abilities.⁴⁵ Immigrant entrepreneurs similarly experience limited access to social capital as well as barriers related to immigration status, credit history and capital, and language access.⁴⁶

39 Jill H. Wilson, "[Investing in English Skills: The Limited English Proficient Workforce in U.S. Metropolitan Areas](#)," Brookings Institution, Sept. 24, 2014; Migration Policy Institute, "[Comments on Proposed Rules for Implementing Provisions of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014](#)," May 27, 2015. Due to limitations in federal data tracking, individuals with limited English proficiency are the closest indicator for identifying immigrants, but not all individuals with limited English proficiency are immigrants. Individuals with limited English proficiency do not speak English as their primary language and have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English. In 2023, 47 percent of immigrants aged 5 and older spoke English less than "very well," accounting for 81 percent of individuals with limited proficiency in English. Similarly, because federal workforce development programs do not track nativity, the closest identifier for immigrant participation is the category of "English Language Learners." Immigrant workers are served across a variety of workforce programs and might be considered under other categories as well, for example low-income adults, but it is very hard to disaggregate their participation. (Migration Policy Institute, "[Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States](#)," March 12, 2025.)

40 David Deming et al., [Navigating Public Job Training](#) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Project on Workforce, March 2023); Gizem Korkmaz et al., [Bridging the Gap for New Americans: Final Report](#) (Washington, D.C.: Westat Insight, March 15, 2024); National Skills Coalition, "[Michigan releases new materials on determining immigrant eligibility for WIOA Title I services](#)," Aug. 22, 2018.

41 U.S. Department of Education, Federal Student Aid, "[Eligibility for Non-U.S. Citizens](#)," Carola Suárez-Orozco, [Recognizing Immigrant-Origin Students in Higher Education](#), Educator Brief Series, vol. 1, no. 5 (Cambridge, MA: Immigration Initiative at Harvard, Nov. 2023).

42 Upwardly Global, [Unlocking Potential: Enhancing Community College Services for Immigrant and Refugee Students](#) (2023).

43 National Skills Coalition, "[Applying a Racial Equity Lens to Digital Literacy](#)," March 20, 2020; Amy L. Gonzales and Ceciley (Xinyi) Zhang, "[First-Level Fundamentals: Computer Ownership Is More Important for Internet Benefits Than In-Home Internet Service](#)," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 30, no. 3 (May 2025).

44 Amanda Bergson-Shilcock and James Witte, [Steps to Success: Integrating Immigrant Professionals in the U.S.](#) (New York: World Education Services, 2015).

45 Batalova and Fix, [Leaving Money on the Table](#).

46 Sadiqshya Nepal and Cristóbal Ramón, [Immigrant Entrepreneurship: Economic Potential and Obstacles to Success](#) (Washington, D.C.: Bipartisan Policy Center, June 2022).

Together, these barriers not only restrict economic mobility for millions of immigrant workers, but also limit the productivity and growth potential of the U.S. workforce at a time when talent is in high demand. The labor force is 1.7 million workers smaller than it was in February 2020.⁴⁷ The national labor force participation rate has hovered in the low 60s for the past decade.⁴⁸ As of August 2025, it was 62.3 percent, compared with 63.4 percent prepandemic, a difference equal to about 3 million potential workers.⁴⁹

To fully capture the potential of the labor force, the U.S. needs to modernize and invest in its underfunded workforce system and address barriers to participation. These efforts must include pursuing structural reforms that streamline program governance, scaling what works, deepening employer collaboration, and ensuring access for all populations, particularly those who have been historically underserved.⁵⁰

III. States' policy responses to labor market shifts

Faced with structural shifts in the labor market, states are using three primary policy tools to grow the size and productivity of their labor forces: 1) expanding participation and optimizing workforce talent in their states; 2) recruiting and retaining talent from other states; and 3) attracting international talent for economic growth and workforce resilience.

A. Expanding workforce participation and optimizing talent

Across the country, states are taking proactive steps to expand the labor market and enhance workforce productivity.⁵¹ Recognizing the complexity of the workforce development landscape — a landscape shaped by federal, state, and local entities as well as by private and nonprofit actors — state leaders are embracing targeted strategies that strengthen participation, improve skills alignment, and drive economic resilience.

Many state activities are funded through federal grants that are passed through to state and local workforce development boards. While states establish workforce plans to steer activities, strong partnerships are crucial for their successful implementation in the broader local workforce ecosystem, which comprises workforce boards collaborating with nonprofit organizations, businesses, industry associations, educational institutions, and other stakeholders.⁵² The primary federal framework, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, authorizes American Job Centers across the country to serve as the primary entry point for accessing career services, education, and training programs.⁵³ Other major federal workforce programs include the Registered Apprenticeship Program and the Career and Technical Education program.⁵⁴

47 Stephanie Ferguson Melhorn, “[Understanding America’s Labor Shortage](#),” U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Nov. 21, 2023; updated July 22, 2025.

48 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “[Labor Force Participation Rate \[CIVPART\]](#),” Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, Sept. 5, 2025.

49 U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, “[The Employment Situation — August 2025](#),” Sept. 5, 2025; U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, “[The Employment Situation — February 2020](#),” March 6, 2020 (reissued Sept. 23, 2020).

50 WorkForce Central, “[Populations Who Experience Systemic Barriers to Employment](#).”

51 Joseph B. Fuller et al., [Governors Reshaping Workforce Development: Turning WIOA Challenges into Workforce Solutions](#) (Project on Workforce, Harvard Kennedy School and National Governors Association, April 2025).

52 National Governors Association, [How Governors Can Execute Their Vision for Workforce Development: Policy Levers Available through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act](#) (Washington, D.C.: NGA); Lauren Eyster et al., [Guide to Learning about Local Workforce Systems](#) (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute, 2022); Rachel Lipson, [Building the New High Road: Immigrants and Workforce Development](#) (Project on Workforce, Sept. 28, 2022).

53 NGA, How Governors Can Execute Their Vision; U.S. Department of Labor, “[American Job Centers](#).”

54 U.S. Department of Labor, [Career Seekers, Apprenticeship USA](#); U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, [Perkins V: Tools and Insights for Career and Technical Education](#).

Expanding work-based learning programs is a pillar of state workforce efforts. Investments span registered apprenticeships and other “earn and learn” models, sector-based training, and short-term training programs leading to industry-recognized, transferable credentials designed to meet demand in fast-growing industries such as healthcare, STEM, AI-related fields, and education.⁵⁵ Concurrently, states are integrating digital- and AI-skills training into workforce programs, strengthening instruction in transferable skills such as critical thinking, communication, and adaptability, and addressing broadband and digital device access.⁵⁶ To prepare the next generation, many states are investing in youth talent pipelines. They are supporting career-focused diplomas, preapprenticeship and apprenticeship programs, and Career and Technical Education pathways that align high school education with future workforce needs.⁵⁷

Expanding the labor pool is also central to states’ efforts. States are lowering participation barriers, using virtual platforms and hybrid programs to make adult education and workforce training more accessible to rural residents, caregivers, and working adults with limited scheduling flexibility.⁵⁸ Similarly, many workforce services are transitioning from in-person to virtual formats and incorporating AI-powered tools.⁵⁹ Bridge programs and preapprenticeships are helping individuals with limited literacy, English proficiency, or lower levels of formal education to access workforce development opportunities and move into the labor market.⁶⁰ States are also focusing on increasing the participation of historically underserved populations, such as veterans, individuals with disabilities, English language learners, Indigenous populations, and out-of-school youth who are unemployed.⁶¹

Comprehensive support services, including navigators to help with benefits and services, career coaching, transportation, and childcare, play a critical role in expanding a labor pool. They help ensure that individu-

55 Taylor White and Dan Hinderliter, “States Take Steps to Expand & Improve Apprenticeship,” *New America*, Nov. 19, 2024; S.B. 5582, 2023–2024 Legislature, Regular Session; H.B. 410, 2024 Regular Session; Mebane Rash, “More skilled workers needed for the jobs of tomorrow: Announcing 5,000 new apprenticeships,” *EdNC*, Feb. 19, 2020; H.F. 255, 90th General Assembly, 2023–2024 Regular Session, Iowa Legislature.

56 Sophia Yager and Jordan Morang, Lessons Learned in Workforce Innovation: How Six States Are Planning to Advance Digital Skills for Equitable Economic Participation (Washington, D.C.: National Governors Association, Oct. 12, 2022); Angelique Maguire, “A Digital Awakening for Adult Education,” *The Evollution*, Jan. 24, 2024; Oregon Governor’s Office, “Governor Kotek Announces Collaboration and Investment to Foster AI Workforce and Economic Development,” April 24, 2025; Government of Ohio, “TechCred,”; Carolyn Crist, “AI Training Lags despite Increased Use at Work, Survey Says,” *CIO Dive*, April 2, 2025; Texas State Technical College, “Skills for Success: Elevate Your Workforce With Essential Soft Skills”; Kelly Wert, “States Using Federal Dollars to Expand Access to Digital Skills and Devices,” *Pew Charitable Trusts*, Oct. 10, 2024; Daniela Dumitru and Diane F. Halpern, “Critical Thinking: Creating Job-Proof Skills for the Future of Work,” *Journal of Intelligence* 11(10):194 2023; Caroline Castrillon, “5 Soft Skills That Are Critical in the Age of AI,” *Forbes*, Jan. 19, 2025; David Deming, “The Growing Importance of Social Skills in the Labor Market,” *NBER Working Paper* 21473 (Aug. 2015; revised June 2017). Although the Trump administration canceled Digital Equity Act grants in May 2025, states have continued broadband and device-access efforts using state or other funding.

57 CareerSource Florida, “Reimagining Education and Career Help (REACH);” Hunter Voegele and Connor McCulloch, “Governor of Alabama Kay Ivey Signs ‘Working for Alabama’ Legislative Package to Create New Tax Incentives and Pathways for Workforce Development,” *Ankura*, May 22, 2024; Iowa Workforce Development, “2023 Statewide Intermediary Work-Based Learning Grant Awards”; S.B. 122, 2024 General Session, Utah State Legislature.

58 Melissa Mack and Kate Dunham, The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Research Portfolio: A Scan of Key Trends in the Labor Market and Workforce Development System (Washington, D.C.: Social Policy Research Associates / U.S. Department of Labor, June 2021); Shawna Anderson and Danielle Cummings, Innovations in Hybrid Service Delivery: Workforce Programs Combine Virtual and In-Person Strategies, OPRE Report 2024-100 (Washington, D.C.: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, 2024); Maguire, “A Digital Awakening for Adult Education.”

59 Shawna Anderson and Danielle Cummings, “Employment and Training Services Go Digital,” *MDRC*, May 2024; Anderson and Cummings, Innovations in Hybrid Service Delivery; Action News 5 Staff, “Tennessee Launches Virtual American Job Center,” *Action News 5*, Dec. 11, 2020.

60 Jessie Stadd and Judy Mortrude, Enhancing Access: Using Bridge Strategies to Connect IELCE Activities to IET Programs (Washington, D.C.: Enhancing Access for Refugees and New Americans/LINCS); U.S. Department of Labor, “Explore Pre-Apprenticeship.”

61 CareerSource Florida, “Strategic Policy and Performance Council Meeting Minutes,” May 20, 2025; Office of the Governor of New York, “Governor Hochul Announces New Workforce Development Initiative to Train Military Members for Careers in the Semiconductor Industry,” May 25, 2022; H.B. 5001, 2023 Gen. Assemb., Reg. Sess. (Conn. 2023); L.D. 1684, 130th Leg., 1st Spec. Sess. (Me. 2021); H.B. 2019, 2023–24 Leg., Reg. Sess. (Wash. 2024); Minn. Stat. § 116L.562 (2024).

als not only enroll in training programs but also complete them and secure employment.⁶² In economically distressed or rural communities, place-based investments are revitalizing local economies by targeting resources to attract, upskill, and retain homegrown talent.⁶³

Postsecondary education access remains a key pillar of state workforce strategies. States are expanding free tuition and financial assistance, as well as wraparound services, at community colleges, which often serve as the backbone of regional training ecosystems.⁶⁴

Many states and employers are also embracing skills-based hiring, focusing on what workers can do rather than what degrees they hold.⁶⁵ States are enhancing their data systems to improve program impact by tracking workforce needs more effectively, targeting outreach more precisely, and measuring program outcomes more accurately.⁶⁶

B. Recruiting and retaining domestic talent

Faced with persistent unmet labor demand and demographic pressures, states have also been implementing recruitment strategies to attract U.S.-born workers from other parts of the country. To complement these efforts, some states have also taken bolder steps to pursue strategies that focus on harnessing immigrant populations already residing in the U.S., capitalizing on an often-overlooked source of skilled and motivated workers.

Recognizing that the existing workforce alone cannot meet long-term demand, many states have positioned themselves as destinations of choice through targeted outreach and incentive programs.⁶⁷ States have launched marketing campaigns — North Dakota’s “Find the Good Life,” Michigan’s award-winning “You Can in Michigan,” and Nebraska’s “The Good Life Is Calling” among them — to showcase the advantages of living and working in their communities.⁶⁸ State and city recruitment campaigns have often paired financial incentives, including relocation stipends and housing support, with messaging that highlights quality of life,

62 Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, “[Governor Shapiro Signs Executive Order Creating New, First-In-The-Nation Workforce Training Program to Take Advantage of Historic Federal Infrastructure Funding](#),” July 31, 2023; National Skills Coalition, “[Bill Creates Funding for Benefit Navigators at All Oregon Public Community Colleges and Universities](#),” July 16, 2021; Cynthia Hess et al., “[Supportive Services in Workforce Development Programs: Administrator Perspectives on Availability and Unmet Needs](#),” Institute for Women’s Policy Research, 2016.

63 H.B. 1710, 94th Gen. Assemb., 2023 Reg. Sess. (Ark. 2023); Anthony P. Carnevale et al., [Small Towns, Big Opportunities: Many Workers in Rural Areas Have Good Jobs, but These Areas Need Greater Investment in Education, Training, and Career Counseling](#) (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2024); Kate Kinder and Lindsey Reichlin Cruse, [College and Career Possibilities Rooted in Place: How Rural Community College and Industry Partnerships Help People, Communities, and Business Thrive](#) (April 2024).

64 Sara Chernikoff, “[Map: Michigan joins list of states that offer tuition-free community college](#),” USA Today, July 27, 2024; Evan Castillo, “[Is Community College Free? Yes, in These 31 States](#),” Best Colleges, June 25, 2022 (updated on July 18, 2025); Tamar Jacoby, [The Indispensable Institution: Rebuilding Community Colleges for the Future of Work](#) (Washington, D.C.: Opportunity America, September 2021); Opportunity America Working Group on Community College Workforce Education, [The Indispensable Institution: Reimagining Community College](#) (Washington, D.C.: Opportunity America, June 2020).

65 Stephanie Ferguson and Isabella Lucy, “[Data Deep Dive: Upskilling and Reskilling Our Workforce](#),” U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Dec. 8, 2022; Andrew Smalley, “[States Consider Elimination of Degree Requirements](#),” National Conference of State Legislatures, Sept. 2023.

66 S.B. 172, 2023 Reg. Sess. (Md. 2023).

67 [Jordan Pandey](#) et al., “26 cities and towns across the US that offer cash and other perks to people who move there,” Business Insider, July 20, 2025.

68 North Dakota Department of Commerce, “[Find the Good Life](#)”; Michael Achterling, “[North Dakota’s Find the Good Life Campaign Aims for ‘Boomerangs’ This Holiday Season](#),” North Dakota Monitor, Dec. 16, 2024; Michigan Economic Development Corporation, “[You Can in Michigan](#)”; Courtney Overbey Martinez, “[Michigan’s Award-Winning Talent Attraction Effort Delivers Momentum with Workers and Relocators](#),” Michigan Economic Development Corporation, Oct. 31, 2024; Garrett Anderson, “[‘You Can in Michigan’ Talent Attraction Campaign Capturing National Attention](#),” Michigan Economic Development Corporation, Oct. 20, 2023; Nebraska Department of Economic Development, “[The Good Life Is Calling](#)”; Nebraska Department of Economic Development, “[DED Announces Talent Recruitment Funding Opportunities through the Good Life Is Calling Campaign](#),” Nov. 6, 2024; Natalia Wolting, “[States That Pay You to Move: Exploring Remote Worker Relocation Programs](#),” Make My Move USA, Nov. 18, 2024.

affordability, and career opportunity.⁶⁹

Despite their promise, domestic recruitment initiatives so far have delivered mixed long-term results.⁷⁰ Structural issues, such as limited housing stock and inadequate transportation infrastructure, and challenges related to community ties and quality of life can undermine states' abilities to attract and retain workers. Without broader population growth, these programs risk simply redistributing labor shortages from one region to another rather than addressing them effectively.⁷¹

Some states have pursued additional strategies to capitalize on an existing – yet untapped – pipeline of work-ready immigrants in the United States. Utah's Center for Immigration and Integration and North Dakota's Global Talent Office have convened roundtables and summits and delivered resources and services to connect businesses and skilled immigrants.⁷² The North Dakota office has also recruited work-authorized immigrants from New York who were matched with employers.⁷³ Its grant program has invested in long-term retention of immigrant talent, supporting eligible businesses and community organizations to advance workforce and community integration.⁷⁴ The Michigan Global Talent Initiative was designed to attract, credential, and place international students and immigrant workers to help the state achieve its 2030 goal for 60 percent of working-age adults to have acquired postsecondary credentials.⁷⁵

States have also worked to retain international students trained at U.S. institutions through employment pathways such as Optional Practical Training (OPT) and university-based H-1B visa sponsorship, drawing on an existing pipeline of educated, work-ready individuals.⁷⁶ West Michigan Rooted has provided services for international students on an OPT or Curricular Practical Training (CPT) pathway.⁷⁷ North Dakota has promoted the OPT pathway, especially in STEM fields.⁷⁸ The Indiana Chamber Foundation has targeted retention of international students who have graduated with STEM degrees to help build dynamic talent pipelines; universities in states such as Iowa have highlighted the OPT pathway as an opportunity for

69 Wolting, “[States That Pay You to Move](#)”; Pandey et al., “26 cities and towns across the US.”

70 Let's Grow Michigan, [Regional Talent Attraction and Retention Interventions: Prospective Strategies for Michigan Communities](#) (Michigan Economic Development Corporation, July 2024); Matthew Wells, “[Paid to Relocate](#),” Econ Focus, Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, 2022; Mark Muro et al., “[Remote work won't save the heartland](#),” Brookings Institution, June 24, 2021.

71 Thomaz Teodorovic et al., “[Location-Specificity and Relocation Incentive Programs for Remote Workers](#),” HBS Working Paper No. 23-071, Harvard Business School, June 2023 (last revised Jan. 2024).

72 Governor's Office of Economic Opportunity, Utah Center for Immigration and Integration, “[State of Oklahoma UCII Presentation](#),” Aug. 2024; Jeff Joseph, “[Episode 93: How Utah is better connecting employers with immigrant talent](#),” BAL Immigration Report, Oct. 3, 2024; North Dakota Department of Commerce, “[Global Talent Office](#).”

73 North Dakota Bismarck Workforce Center, “[A Workforce Center Partner Agency Update](#),” The Bismarck Connector, Job Service-Bismarck Quarterly Newsletter, Jan. 2025; Jill Schramm, “[Workforce Programs Recruit Nationally](#),” Minot Daily News, Nov. 25, 2024; North Dakota Department of Commerce, [North Dakota Workforce Development Council Report of Recommendations](#).

74 North Carolina Global Talent Office, “[Global Talent Office Grant Program](#).”

75 State of Michigan, “[Sixty by 30 Strategic Plan](#)”; Michigan Global Talent Initiative, “[2024 Census Immigration Data Reveals Michigan Global Talent Initiative \(MGTI\) on Track to Help Meet Ambitious Sixty by 30 Goals](#)”; Michigan Global Talent Initiative, [Filling Michigan's Talent Gap: Annual Report 2024](#) (2024).

76 U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), “Optional Practical Training (OPT) for F-1 Students.”

77 Michigan Growth Office, “[Michigan's Growth Office Awards Over \\$660K to Support the Creation of Five Regional Talent Retention and Attraction Programs](#),” Michigan Economic Development Office, Oct. 17, 2024; Make My Move, “[West Michigan Rooted](#)”; West Michigan Works, West Michigan Works! (WMW) Workforce Development Board (WDB) Meeting,” Oct. 24, 2024; USCIS, “[Curricular Practical Training](#).”

78 North Dakota Job Service, [WIOA Annual Report PY 2023](#) (2023)(reporting that recruitment and retention strategy included employer education on “Exploring International Student Pathways to Maximize Your Talent Strategy”); Foster LLP, “[Employing F-1 International Students Webinar](#),” Sept. 7, 2023; North Dakota Job Service, “[ND Global Talent Connect-Virtual Job Fair for International Students](#),” May 1, 2025; North Dakota Global Talent Office, “[Global Talent, Local Impact: Strategies for Retaining OPT Employees](#),” Nov. 21, 2024; North Dakota Global Talent Office, “[Optional Practical Training \(OPT\)](#).”

employers to meet workforce needs in engineering and manufacturing.⁷⁹

Other states have formed innovative partnerships with universities, businesses, and nonprofit organizations to attract and retain immigrant entrepreneurs, including many of whom were recent graduates, through Global Entrepreneur-in-Residence (Global EIR) programs.⁸⁰ These programs enable universities to sponsor immigrant entrepreneurs through uncapped H-1B visas. California, Connecticut, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, and Washington's workforce board, as well as Global Cleveland, have launched or expanded Global EIR programs.⁸¹ Michigan's program, run by Global Detroit, has generated over 170 jobs and \$28 million in investment since 2019.⁸²

C. Attracting international talent for economic growth and workforce resilience

Some states have integrated global talent recruitment into their workforce strategies through employment-based legal pathways.⁸³ However, unlike refugee resettlement, which includes formal roles for states, employment-based immigration lacks mechanisms for federal-state collaboration. Because federal constraints limit state capacity to leverage international recruitment fully, states must navigate fragmented processes and rely on ad hoc solutions to meet urgent labor needs.

To move forward, many states are now advocating a modernized federal-state partnership on employment-based immigration that would allow states to help shape and implement immigration pathways aligned with regional economic priorities. Utah Governor Spencer Cox and Indiana Governor Eric Holcomb, for example, proposed allowing states to sponsor immigrants directly, similar to how employers or universities can, so that immigration policy can better align with regional economic needs.⁸⁴

Until coordination improves, states will continue to innovate within existing constraints. North Dakota and Utah have been national leaders in this space. Launched within its Department of Commerce in 2023, North Dakota's Global Talent Office spearheads a strategy to attract, retain, and integrate immigrant talent from abroad and already in the United States. The office serves as a hub of resources and activities to educate and support employers.⁸⁵ More than 200 employers and community organizations have engaged with the office, which has been nationally recognized as a best-practice model.⁸⁶ Utah's Center for Immigration and Integration, established in 2021, assists individuals and businesses in navigat-

79 Indiana Chamber Foundation, [Indiana Prosperity 2035 – A Vision for Economic Acceleration](#) (Aug. 2023); [Iowa State University Center for Industrial Research and Service, “Unlock Short-Term Engineering Expertise: How Iowa Companies Can Benefit from International Student Talent,” Sept. 25, 2024.](#)

80 Connor O'Brien, [“How more states and cities can retain immigrant entrepreneurs,”](#) Economic Innovation Group, May 17, 2024.

81 UC San Diego Innovation, [“Global Entrepreneur-In-Residence,”](#); S.B. 250, 2024 Gen. Assemb., Reg. Sess. (Conn. 2024), Connecticut General Assembly; Ashley Zane, [“Testimony in Support of S.B. 250,”](#) written testimony before the Commerce Committee, Connecticut General Assembly, March 5, 2024; Time Keenan, [“Global Detroit Report: Place More Foreign-Born Startup Founders at Universities - DBusiness Magazine,”](#) DBusiness Magazine, Aug. 12, 2024; Office of Governor Kathy Hochul, [“Governor Hochul Announces Plan to Grow and Strengthen New York's Economy,”](#) Jan. 9, 2024; Empire State Development, [“New York Global Entrepreneurs Program, RFA,”](#) Sept. 12, 2025; New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, [“Notice of Fund Availability for Fiscal Year 2025: Global Entrepreneurs in Residence Pilot Program,”](#) 2024; Washington Workforce Training and Education Coordination Board, [“Workforce Budget Provisos \(Operating and Transportation Budgets\) 2024,”](#) March 21, 2024; Global Cleveland, [“Global Entrepreneur in Residence - Global Cleveland.”](#)

82 Global Detroit, [Global Entrepreneur in Residence \(Global EIR\) Program: 2024 Impact Report](#) (2024).

83 There are three primary legal pathways to the U.S.: humanitarian-based, family-based, and employment-based.

84 Eric Holcomb and Spencer Cox, [“To solve our national immigration crisis, let states sponsor immigrants,”](#) Washington Post, Feb. 21, 2023.

85 North Dakota Department of Commerce, [“Global Talent Office,”](#); Katie Ralston Howe, [“Testimony,”](#) Interim Workforce Committee, Oct. 7, 2024, North Dakota Legislative Branch.

86 “Workforce,” North Dakota Public Notices, Dec. 26, 2024.

ing pathways to recruit and retain global talent and promotes economic opportunities and integration for immigrant residents.⁸⁷ Through partnerships such as the Joint Utah-Mexico Partnership (JUMP), the state is exploring employment-based visa pathways for graduates in high-demand industries.⁸⁸

States are not alone in innovating solutions. The North Dakota Petroleum Council established the Bakken GROW (Global Recruitment of Oilfield Workers) initiative to recruit employees through the Uniting for Ukraine program, which provided a legal pathway for work-authorized immigrants.⁸⁹ Alamo Colleges District partnered with Mexico's Tecmilenio University and a local employer, Methodist Healthcare System, to create a pipeline to train and recruit nursing professionals.⁹⁰

Between Texas and Mexico, an international nursing pathway

Faced with a projection of 57,000 open nursing positions by 2032, San Antonio's Alamo Colleges District partnered with Mexico's Tecmilenio University to establish the International Nursing Pathway program in 2023.⁹¹ Methodist Healthcare System, which participated in creating the program, will hire qualified nurses who complete the program. The self-directed online program trains foreign-credentialed nurses to take the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) exam to become registered nurses in the United States. Once they complete their coursework, students become eligible to apply for work visas.⁹² The pathway is designed with micro-credentials and digital badges, a replicable model for other international educational and workforce development initiatives.⁹³ The first cohort of graduates was to begin working at Methodist Healthcare System hospitals in San Antonio in spring 2025.⁹⁴

87 Governor's Office of Economic Opportunity, "[Utah Center for Immigration and Integration](#)" (the Center for Immigration and Integration is listed as Center for Global Talent); S.B. 153, 2023 Gen. Sess. (Utah 2023).

88 Governor's Office of Economic Opportunity, "[Joint Utah Mexico Partnership \(JUMP\) Strategic Plan 2025](#)"; Utah Governor's Office of Economic Opportunity, "[Joint Utah Mexico Partnership](#)," 2023.

89 North Dakota Petroleum Council, "[NDPC Creates Bakken GROW \(Global Recruitment of Oilfield Workers\) Program](#)"; "[Bakken GROW](#)."

90 Texas Department of State Health Services, [Updated Nurse Supply and Demand Projections, 2018–2032](#), Publication No. 25-1575 (Austin: Texas Department of State Health Services, July 2020); Institute of International Education, "[Tri-Lateral International Partnership Aims to Fill Nursing Shortage](#)," IIE Blog, June 17, 2025; "[International Nursing Pathway by Alamo Colleges District & Tecmilenio](#)," Skilling Center Tecmilenio.

91 Texas Department of State Health Services, [Updated Nurse Supply and Demand Projections, 2018–2032](#), Publication No. 25-1575 (Austin: Texas Department of State Health Services, July 2020); Institute of International Education, "[Tri-Lateral International Partnership Aims to Fill Nursing Shortage](#)," IIE Blog, June 17, 2025; "[International Nursing Pathway by Alamo Colleges District & Tecmilenio](#)," Skilling Center Tecmilenio.

92 Amber Hughes, "[Alamo Colleges trains nurses from other countries to fill health care workforce shortages](#)," Spectrum News 1, Jan. 3, 2024; National Council of State Boards of Nursing, [NCLEX](#).

93 Learn & Work Ecosystem Library, "[Global Learner Pathway, Pathways Model, & Cross-Border Partnership in Nursing — Alamo Colleges District](#)," April 7, 2025.

94 IIE, "[Tri-Lateral International Partnership](#)."

IV. Opportunity by design: Leveraging the contributions of immigrants (2020–2024)

Amid the profound labor market shifts outlined above, a quiet but steady bipartisan momentum has emerged to harness the economic potential of immigrant workers as part of states' broader workforce and economic development strategies. While this momentum was built on more than 15 years of collaboration among state policymakers, the private sector, and civil society to expand immigrant economic inclusion, it was accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic and the urgent need for skilled workers, particularly in the healthcare sector.

As demand for both workers and skilled talent has intensified, states have responded by increasingly incorporating employment-authorized immigrants into their workforce plans. These strategies acknowledge that meaningful workforce expansion must include all eligible talent and that immigrants are key drivers of economic growth. Employment-authorized immigrants account for roughly 13 percent of the U.S. workforce, making significant contributions to critical industries such as healthcare, technology, manufacturing, and construction.⁹⁵ Immigrants paid approximately \$652 billion in taxes in 2023.⁹⁶ The roughly 22 million work-authorized immigrants active in the U.S. labor market not only fill roles across the skills spectrum, but they also complement existing jobs, enhancing productivity and stimulating job creation.⁹⁷

Moreover, immigrant entrepreneurs have strengthened America's competitive advantage by founding more firms per capita than native-born U.S. citizens, fueling job creation and innovation.⁹⁸ Since 1990, immigrants have accounted for 16 percent of all inventors yet are responsible for 36 percent of all U.S. innovation.⁹⁹ Remarkably, nearly half of the 2024 Fortune 500 companies were founded by immigrants or their children.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, higher levels of immigration in the recent past are projected to significantly enhance the economy, reducing federal deficits by \$900 billion, contributing \$1.2 trillion to federal revenues, and boosting GDP by \$8.9 trillion over 2024–2034.¹⁰¹

Drawing on overall workforce strategies to leverage more of this talent pool, states have created real, measurable pathways to opportunity for employment-authorized immigrants. State activities can be grouped in four categories.

First, states have directed policy through bipartisan studies, workforce development plans, and economic strategies to identify the contributions of immigrant talent. Some policies have specifically identified immigrants, while others have included them as individuals facing systemic barriers, such as English language learners, or simply as state residents. State entities such as Offices of New Americans (ONA) crucially amplified this policy direction across agencies and with local governments. Business leaders, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders have reinforced the policy momentum.

Second, states have focused on barriers limiting participation and skill utilization, including complex licensing and credential recognition processes as well as access to language instruction, workforce training, and services. They have cut through red tape and efficiently expanded access to English learning and workforce development through virtual platforms and other digital tools, increasing the use of blended bridge and

95 Kramer and Passel, [“What the Data Says about Immigrants in the U.S.”](#)

96 American Immigration Council, [“Immigrants in The United States.”](#)

97 Kramer and Passel, [“What the Data Says about Immigrants in the U.S.”](#); U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, [“Work Experience Of The Population — 2023,”](#) Dec. 18, 2024; U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, [“Foreign-Born Workers: Labor Force Characteristics — 2023,”](#) May 21, 2024; author calculations. David J. Bier, [“Unlocking America's Potential: How Immigration Fuels Economic Growth and Our Competitive Advantage,”](#) written testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on the Budget, September 13, 2023; Dany Bahar and Greg Wright, [A Roadmap for Immigration Reform: Identifying Weak Links in the Labor Supply Chain](#) (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, March 2023).

98 Peter Dizikes, [“Study: Immigrants in the U.S. Are More Likely to Start Firms, Create Jobs,”](#) MIT News, May 9, 2022.

99 Shai Bernstein et al., [“The Contribution of High-Skilled Immigrants to Innovation in the United States,”](#) NBER Working Paper No. 30797 (Dec. 2022).

100 American Immigration Council, [“New American Fortune 500 in 2024,”](#) Sept. 9, 2024.

101 Congressional Budget Office, [Effects of the Immigration Surge on the Federal Budget and the Economy](#) (Washington, D.C.: CBO, July 2024).

hybrid programs and reaching people whom brick-and-mortar solutions have often left out. Investment in skills-based hiring, partnerships, and diverse funding streams has also expanded access to opportunities.

Third, states have pursued strategies to retain and recruit immigrant talent, capitalizing on underutilized pipelines of skilled, work-ready international graduates of U.S. institutions of higher education, immigrant entrepreneurs, international medical graduates, and immigrant workers already living in the United States.

Fourth, states have enhanced pathways to opportunity through ONAs, language access overall, postsecondary pathways, and immigrant entrepreneurship.

In short, states have taken steps to increase labor market productivity by embracing employment-authorized immigrants as a vital part of the workforce. The following discussion provides a sample of the breadth and depth of states' activities.

Building a modern workforce

As far as North Dakota's Global Talent Office is concerned, if someone is legally authorized to work in the United States, then they are legally authorized to work in the Peace Garden State.

"Anyone who is legally authorized to work in the U.S. can work here. Reducing barriers to employment is a shared goal of the Global Talent Office and their partners. This includes improving access to English language learning options that support workforce inclusion and upskilling," according to Janna L. Pastir of the North Dakota Global Talent Office. The office is committed to reducing barriers to employment by improving English language learning options, upskilling, workforce inclusion, and other support.¹⁰²

A. Streamlining licensing and credentialing

Catalyzed by Covid-19, states launched a wave of reforms aimed at lowering regulatory barriers and creating more accessible licensure pathways for internationally trained professionals.¹⁰³ These efforts built on earlier bipartisan momentum for licensing reform and reflected an urgent need to more fully integrate skilled immigrants into states' economies and critical service sectors.¹⁰⁴ States including Colorado, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Utah, Washington, and Wisconsin identified barriers and recommended solutions, particularly in response to healthcare workforce needs.¹⁰⁵

102 Email with Janna L. Pastir, North Dakota Global Talent Office, May 9, 2025; on file with author.

103 Jeanne Batalova et al., [Brain Waste Among U.S. Immigrants with Health Degrees: A Multi-State Profile](#) (Washington, D.C.: Migration Policy Institute, 2020).

104 National Conference of State Legislatures, United States Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration, National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, and The Council of State Governments, [Assessing State Policies and Practices: Project Overview and Lessons Learned from the Occupational Licensing Learning Consortium](#) (Washington, D.C.: NCSL, Dec. 2020).

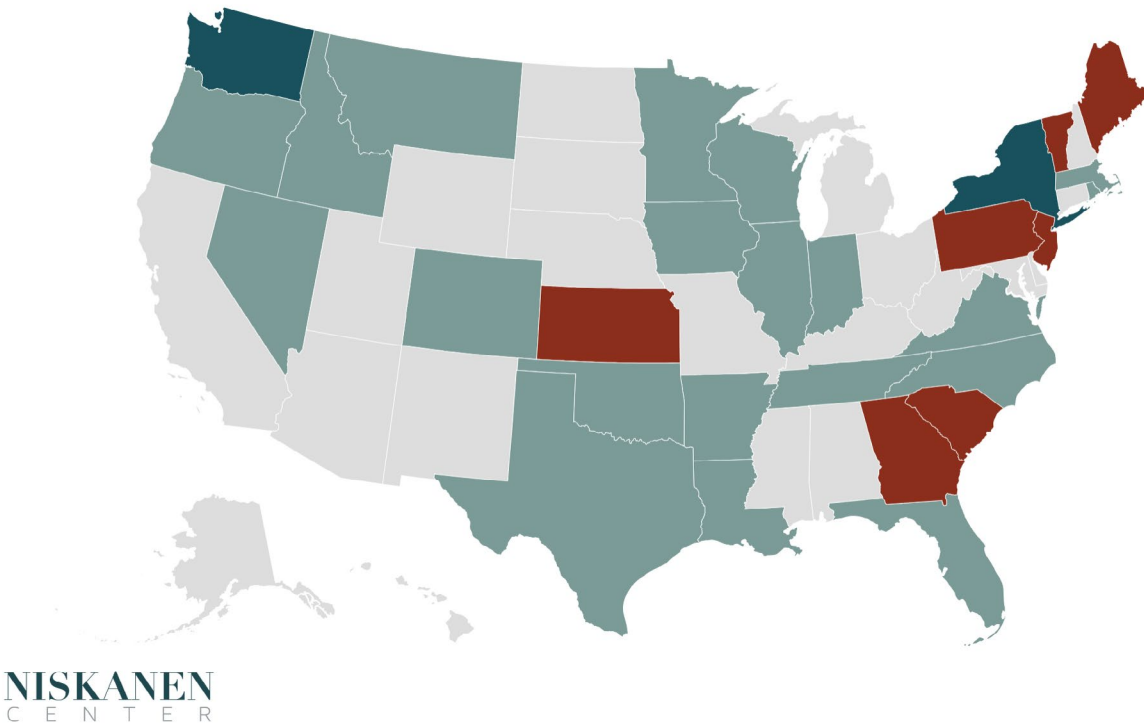
105 Nurse-Physician Advisory Task Force for Colorado Healthcare, "[Licensure Recommendations Regarding International Medical Graduates](#)," Colorado Department of Regulatory Agencies, Aug. 6, 2021; [S.B. 22-140](#), 2022 Reg. Sess. (Colo. 2022) (directing the Office of New Americans ONA to create a [Global Talent Task Force](#)); Global Talent Task Force, [Global Talent Task Force Final Report](#) (Denver: Colorado Office of New Americans, Dec. 2023); [H.B. 5465](#), 102d Gen. Assemb., Reg. Sess. (Ill. 2022) (Task Force on Internationally-Licensed Health Care Professionals); [L.D. 937](#), 131st Leg., 1st Reg. Sess. (Me. 2023) (Commission Regarding Foreign-Trained Physicians Living in Maine); [H.B. 625](#), 2022 Reg. Sess. (Md. 2022) (Commission to Study the Health Care Workforce Crisis in Maryland); [S.D. 3237](#), 192d Gen. Ct. (Mass. 2022) (Special Commission on Foreign-Trained Medical Professionals Final Report); Michigan Task Force on Foreign Trained Medical Professional Licensing, [Foreign Trained Medical Professional Licensing: Report and Recommendations](#) (Lansing: Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs, Dec. 5, 2023); Pennsylvania Department of State, New Pennsylvanians Licensure Survey: Results & Analysis (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Department of State, Dec. 2021); Office of Colorado Governor's Office for Economic Opportunity and Center for Economic Development and Belonging, [Survey on Internationally Trained Professionals](#) (Utah: May 8, 2024); Washington Medical Commission, "[International Medical Graduate Workgroup](#)"; Wisconsin Department of Health Services, [Governor's Task Force on the Healthcare Workforce Report](#) (Aug. 19, 2024).

Meeting immediate needs

In 2020, all 50 states enacted some type of occupational licensure reform, through a combination of executive orders, legislation, and regulatory changes to enable workers to more easily meet immediate needs, in particular in healthcare and emergency response fields.¹⁰⁶

Figure 1: Legislative progress by state

■ No active legislation ■ Permanent pathway ■ Pending permanent pathway legislation ■ Temporary pathway and pending permanent legislation



Source: “Implementing new licensing pathways that work for international doctors and American patients,” The Niskanen Center, by Jonathan Wolfson, Lawson Mansell, Katherine Hall, December 11, 2025.

International medical graduates have been a focus of reform. As of October 2025, Arkansas, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Wisconsin had enacted legislation establishing alternative pathways for internationally trained physicians leading to full, permanent licensure.¹⁰⁷ These laws often pair requirements that doctors work in underserved areas under the supervision of fully licensed physicians, while removing redundant training mandates. Colorado made them eligible for a “reentry license” and reduced the required period of U.S. medical residency from three years to one; Montana permitted two alternate qualifications for a U.S. medical residency.¹⁰⁸ Georgia, Kansas, Maine, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Vermont were debating

¹⁰⁶ NCSL et al., [Assessing State Policies and Practices](#).

¹⁰⁷ [S.B. 601](#), 2025 Reg. Sess. (Ark. 2025); [S.B. 7016](#), 2024 Reg. Sess. (Fla. 2024); [H.B. 542](#), 67th Leg., 2d Reg. Sess. (Idaho 2024); [S.F. 477](#), 2023–24 Reg. Sess. (Iowa 2023); [49 Ill. Reg. § 1285.345](#) (Jan. 10, 2025), Illinois Secretary of State (Rules of Governmental Agencies); [H.B. 1555](#), 2025 Reg. Sess. (Ind. 2025); [H.B. 972](#), 2024 Reg. Sess. (La. 2024); [Ch. 238, § 226](#), Acts of 2024 (Mass. 2024); [H.F. 2](#), 94th Leg., 1st Spec. Sess. (Minn. 2025); [S.B. 124](#), 83d Leg., 2025 Reg. Sess. (Nev. 2025); [H.B. 67](#), 2025–26 Reg. Sess. (N.C. 2025); [H.B. 2050](#), 2025 Reg. Sess. (Okla. 2025); [S.B. 476](#), 2025 Reg. Sess. (Or. 2025); [H.B. 5108](#), 2025 Reg. Sess. (R.I. 2025); [S.B. 1936](#), 113th Gen. Assemb., 2023–24 Reg. Sess. (Tenn. 2023); [H.B. 2038](#), 89th Leg., Reg. Sess. (Tex. 2025); [H.B. 995](#), 2024 Reg. Sess. (Va. 2024); [A.B. 954](#), 2023–24 Leg., Reg. Sess. (Wis. 2023).

¹⁰⁸ [H.B. 22-1050](#), 2022 Reg. Sess. (Colo. 2022), 2022 Reg. Sess. (Colo. 2022); [Mont. Admin. r. 24.156.607](#) (Graduate Training Requirements for Foreign Medical Graduates).

similar reforms leading to full, permanent licensure, while other states such as Arizona, Kentucky, and Missouri recently considered such pathways.¹⁰⁹

Several states have adopted policies to facilitate the practice of international medical graduates in their respective professions. New York and Washington offered limited licenses, while their legislatures were considering full, permanent licensure paths. Alabama and Pennsylvania allowed international medical graduates to apply for a full license after two years of residency in the United States.¹¹⁰

Reforms extended well beyond physicians. Hawaii and Kentucky permitted internationally trained nurses to work under temporary permits while completing requirements for a state licensure by endorsement (as opposed to direct reciprocity).¹¹¹ Virginia streamlined licensing for internationally trained nurses and created a pathway for internationally trained massage therapists.¹¹² Michigan, Maryland, and Virginia created pathways for internationally trained teachers, with Michigan also adding a pathway for school counselors.¹¹³ Alaska made licensure easier for foreign-trained physical and occupational therapists by eliminating English-language testing requirements for therapists whose programs were taught in English.¹¹⁴ Oregon acted to reduce language and credential barriers for licensure in early childhood education.¹¹⁵ And Massachusetts developed a Limited Dental Intern License to support the reentry of foreign-trained dental professionals.¹¹⁶

Colorado's pilot on licensing reform

One of the country's early efforts to address licensing barriers for immigrants, Colorado's Immigrant Gap Analysis Committee brought together executive branch officials and legislators to streamline processes for immigrant barbers and cosmetologists, professions with high demand among immigrant workers.¹¹⁷ The resulting Barber and Cosmetologist Act of 2019 allowed foreign work experience to count toward required training hours. By recognizing prior experience, Colorado created a model for streamlining entry for qualified professionals.¹¹⁸

109 Federation of State Medical Boards, [States with Enacted and Proposed Additional Licensure Pathways: State-by-State Overview](#), last updated Oct. 2025; [S.B. 1108](#), 57th Leg., 1st Reg. Sess. (Ariz. 2025); [S.B. 142](#), 2025–26 Reg. Sess. (Ga. 2025); [H.B. 2251](#), 2025–26 Reg. Sess. (Kan. 2025); [H.B. 786](#), 2025 Reg. Sess. (Ky. 2025); [L.D. 105](#), 132nd Leg. (Me. 2025); [H.B. 1198](#), 2025 Reg. Sess. (Mo. 2025); [A. 5955](#), 2024–25 Leg., Reg. Sess. (N.J. 2025); [H.B. 1066](#), 2025–26 Reg. Sess. (Pa. 2025); [S. 376](#), 2025–26 Reg. Sess. (S.C. 2025); [S. 142](#), 2025–26 Reg. Sess. (Vt. 2025).

110 New York State Education Department, Office of the Professions, "[License Requirements for Physicians](#)"; [A. 7319](#), 2025–26 Reg. Sess. (N.Y. 2025); Washington Medical Commission, "[International Medical Graduates Clinical Experience License](#)"; [H.B. 1306](#), 69th Legis., 2025 Reg. Sess. (Wash. 2025); Joshua LeBerte, "[Law to Address Alabama's Health Care Worker Shortage Now in Effect](#)," Alabama Public Radio, August 18, 2023; [H.B. 245](#), 2021–22 Reg. Sess. (Pa. 2021).

111 [S.B. 601](#), 2025 Reg. Sess. (Ark. 2025); [S.B. 7016](#), 2024 Reg. Sess. (Fla. 2024); [H.B. 542](#), 67th Leg., 2d Reg. Sess. (Idaho 2024); [S.F. 477](#), 2023–24 Reg. Sess. (Iowa 2023); [49 Ill. Reg., Sect. 1285.345](#) (Jan. 10, 2025), Illinois Secretary of State (Rules of Governmental Agencies); [H.B. 1555](#), 2025 Reg. Sess. (Ind. 2025); [H.B. 972](#), 2024 Reg. Sess. (La. 2024); [Ch. 238, § 226](#), Acts of 2024 (Mass. 2024); [H.F. 2](#), 94th Leg., 1st Spec. Sess. (Minn. 2025); [S.B. 124](#), 83d Leg., 2025 Reg. Sess. (Nev. 2025); [H.B. 67](#), 2025–26 Reg. Sess. (N.C. 2025); [H.B. 2050](#), 2025 Reg. Sess. (Okla. 2025); [S.B. 476](#), 2025 Reg. Sess. (Or. 2025); [H.B. 5108](#), 2025 Reg. Sess. (R.I. 2025); [S.B. 1936](#), 113th Gen. Assemb., 2023–24 Reg. Sess. (Tenn. 2023); [H.B. 2038](#), 89th Leg., Reg. Sess. (Tex. 2025); [H.B. 995](#), 2024 Reg. Sess. (Va. 2024); [A.B. 954](#), 2023–24 Leg., Reg. Sess. (Wis. 2023).

112 [H.B. 22-1050](#), 2022 Reg. Sess. (Colo. 2022).

113 [S.B. 61](#), 2023 Reg. Sess. (Mich. 2023); COMAR 13A.12.02.03 (Pathways to Teacher Licensure), [Permission to Adopt](#) (Jan. 28, 2025), Maryland State Board of Education; [H.B. 979](#), 2022 Reg. Sess. (Va. 2022); [S.B. 162](#), 2023 Reg. Sess. (Mich. 2023).

114 [H.B. 99](#), 32d Leg., 2021–22 (Alaska 2021).

115 [H.B. 2504](#), 2023 Reg. Sess. (Or. 2023).

116 Commonwealth of Massachusetts, "[Apply for a Limited Dental Intern License](#)."

117 NCSL et al., [Assessing State Policies and Practices](#).

118 Ibid.

Some states took steps to reduce red tape more broadly. Utah authorized state agencies to issue licenses or certifications to internationally trained professionals whose qualifications and experiences were substantially equivalent to state standards.¹¹⁹ Missouri recognized international credentials for dietitians and physical therapists if they were substantially equivalent to the state's standards.¹²⁰ Virginia required a number of regulatory boards to develop regulations providing a pathway to licensure or certification for such professionals.¹²¹ Vermont enabled licensing by endorsement for foreign-trained professionals who met equivalency benchmarks.¹²² New Mexico introduced expedited licenses for certain internationally trained professionals, subject to board regulations, and directed regulatory development of pathways for social workers and veterinarians.¹²³

Demand for licensing opportunity

Within three months of Utah passing its second licensure bill, the Department of Commerce had received more than 2,600 inquiries from internationally trained professionals, with over 60 percent coming from healthcare providers. The majority resided outside of Utah, with roughly one-fifth from inside the state.¹²⁴

To further reduce barriers, states have eliminated the unnecessary requirement of immigration status as a condition for licensure.¹²⁵ States including Delaware, Colorado, New Jersey, Nevada, New Mexico, Vermont, and Washington removed this barrier and accepted Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITIN) in place of Social Security numbers.¹²⁶ Illinois extended its earlier licensing reform to healthcare workers by accepting ITINs for healthcare professions.¹²⁷ Maryland removed status-related barriers for health occupation licensure.¹²⁸ Arkansas broadened eligibility to include individuals with work authorization, reaching nearly 5,000 DACA recipients.¹²⁹

States have also addressed logistical and administrative challenges that disproportionately burden internationally trained professionals. Illinois, Maryland, and Massachusetts broadened English-proficiency testing options

119 [S.B. 43](#), 2022 Gen. Sess. (Utah 2022); [S.B. 35](#), 2023 Gen. Sess. (Utah 2023); [H.B. 58](#), 2024 Gen. Sess. (Utah 2024).

120 [20 CSR 2150-3](#) (May 31, 2020), Missouri Secretary of State; [20 CSR 2150-3.010](#) (May 31, 2020), Missouri Secretary of State; Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, "[Missouri Statutes](#)," Eat Right Pro.

121 [S.B. 1188](#), 2025 Reg. Sess. (Va. 2025); Va. Code [§ 54.1-205.1](#) (2025).

122 Tim, "[Condos: New Pathway to Licensure for Vermonters Trained Outside US](#)," Vermont Business Magazine, Jan.19, 2022.

123 [H.B. 191](#), 2022 Reg. Sess. (N.M. 2022), New Mexico Legislature; [H.B. 384](#), 2022 Reg. Sess. (N.M. 2022), New Mexico Legislature.

124 [S.B. 35](#) (Utah 2023); Sydney Chapman Gonzalez, "[Demand is high from immigrant professionals looking to become licensed in Utah](#)," [KSL.com](#), Aug. 6, 2023.

125 Licensing reforms enabled self-employed entrepreneurs to obtain occupational licenses necessary to work in their fields.

126 S.B. 80, 152d Gen. Assemb., 2023–24 (Del. 2023); see [TheDream.US & Immigrant Finance](#), "[State Professional / Occupational License Requirements for Immigrants](#)," 2023. [S.B. 21-077](#), 2021 Reg. Sess. (Colo. 2021); [S. 2455](#), 2020–21 Reg. Sess. (N.J. 2020); see State of New Jersey Office of the Attorney General Division of Consumer Affairs, "[Eligibility for Professional and Occupational Licensure in New Jersey](#)," 2022. [S.B. 219](#), 2021 Reg. Sess. (N.M. 2021); see [S.B. 137](#), 2020 Reg. Sess. (N.M. 2020). [A.B. 275](#), 2019 Sess. (Nev. 2019); [H. 606](#), 2023–24 Sess. (Vt. 2023); [H.B. 1889](#), 2023–24 Leg., Reg. Sess. (Wash. 2023).

127 [H.B. 4332](#), 102d Gen. Assemb., 2021–22 Reg. Sess. (Ill. 2021); [S.B. 3109](#), 100th Gen. Assemb., 2017–18 Reg. Sess. (Ill. 2017).

128 [S.B. 187](#), 2023 Reg. Sess. (Md. 2023).

129 [H.B. 1735](#), 93d Gen. Assemb., 2021 Reg. Sess. (Ark. 2021); Molly Mitchell, "[New Arkansas Laws Remove Barriers for Immigrants, Despite Legislature's Rightward Turn](#)," Arkansas Times, June 30, 2021.

for nursing licenses, with Maryland estimating that 80 nurses could benefit.¹³⁰ Maine converted an interest-free loan program to help cover credentialing costs to a grant program.¹³¹ Pennsylvania reimbursed individuals in early childhood education career pathways for credential evaluation expenses.¹³² Massachusetts' statewide nursing workforce council called for removing excessive administrative requirements that hinder entry.¹³³

To support successful transitions, states have invested in direct assistance programs. Colorado launched training and support services for international medical graduates.¹³⁴ Illinois created a licensing liaison, and in partnership with its Office of New Americans, the state initiated a clinical readiness program.¹³⁵ Minnesota funded career navigators to assist with licensing, residency placement, and broader career advising.¹³⁶ Connecticut added English-language support to help internationally trained social workers meet licensure requirements.¹³⁷

Data informing policy: Utah's licensing processes

Utah's New Americans Task Force represents over 200 nonprofits, businesses, industry associations, state and local governments, faith-based communities, and individuals.¹³⁸ Its "Survey of Internationally Trained Professionals" revealed that 70 percent of immigrants in the state had occupational licenses from outside the U.S., yet many were working in low-skilled jobs due to licensing and language barriers.¹³⁹ The report's findings informed state efforts to increase support for internationally trained professionals in licensing processes, including improvements at the Internationally Trained Applicant Credentialing Program site.¹⁴⁰

Several states have also sought to increase the overall capacity of their systems. Minnesota, Florida, and Iowa allocated funds to expand the number of physician residency slots.¹⁴¹ Washington considered residency positions specifically for international medical graduates.¹⁴²

Capacity-building efforts have been reinforced by sustained use of federal visa waiver programs such as

130 Illinois Register, Department of Financial and Professional Regulation, "Notice of Proposed Amendments," March 20, 2020; Maryland Division of State Documents, "Qualifications of Applicants for Examination," 2025; Commonwealth of Massachusetts Board of Registration in Nursing, "Licensure Policy 06-01, Board-designated Tests of English Proficiency and Required Minimum Cut Scores"; Subaita Rahman, "How States Are Opening Their Own Pathways to Occupational Licensure," World Education Services, Sept. 3, 2024.

131 H.P. 1209, L.D. 1685, 129th Leg., 1st Reg. Sess. (Me. 2019); H.P. 741, L.D. 1169, 131st Leg., 1st Spec. Sess. (Me. 2023).

132 The Pennsylvania Key, "Foreign Degree Evaluation Reimbursement."

133 Nursing Council of Workforce Sustainability Workforce Capacity Committee, "Eliminating Administrative Barriers to Enhance the Transition of Internationally Educated and Trained Nurses into Nursing Practice within Massachusetts," Jan. 9, 2025.

134 H.B. 22-1050 (Colo. 2022).

135 H.B. 2948, 103d Gen. Assemb., 2023–24 Reg. Sess. (Ill. 2023); H.B. 778, 103d Gen. Assemb., 2023–24 Reg. Sess. (Ill. 2023).

136 H.F. 4065-3, 92d Leg., 2021–22 Reg. Sess. (Minn. 2022).

137 State of Connecticut Department of Public Health, "LCSW Licensing Requirements." Accessed June 30, 2025.

138 The Center for Economic Opportunity & Belonging, "New Americans Taskforce." Accessed July 1, 2025.

139 Governor's Office for Economic Opportunity and The Center for Economic Development and Belonging, [Survey on Internationally Trained Professionals](#) (Utah: May 8, 2024).

140 Governor's Office of Economic Opportunity, "Immigrants Key to Solving Workforce Shortages," Aug. 1, 2024; Utah Division of Professional Licensing, "Internationally-Trained Applicant Information."

141 Minn. Stat. § 144.1912 (2024); Fla. Stat. § 409.909 (2023); H.F. 972, 91st Gen. Assemb., 2025–26 Reg. Sess. (Iowa 2025); Governor Kim Reynolds, "Gov. Reynolds Issues Statement on HF 972 Passing House and Senate," May 14, 2025.

142 S.B. 5226, 69th Leg., 2025 Reg. Sess. (Wash. 2025).

the Conrad 30 program, regional programs, and the National Interest Waiver, which serve as key levers for expanding healthcare access in rural and underserved areas while providing employment opportunities for high-skilled immigrants.¹⁴³ Missouri credited the National Interest Waiver program for greatly improving access to healthcare in underserved communities. Between 2015 and 2023, Missouri supported 125 National Interest Waiver applications, with 54 of those submitted since 2020.¹⁴⁴ Texas supported more than 400 applications between 2000 and 2020.¹⁴⁵ Iowa highlighted the role of the National Interest Waiver to address the shortage of physicians in medically underserved areas of the state.¹⁴⁶

Regional waivers: Delta Doctors

The Delta Regional Authority's visa waiver program, Delta Doctors, has placed around 800 doctors in underserved and rural communities since 2019, delivering vital care and economic benefit across Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee.¹⁴⁷ In testimony to Congress, the regional authority estimated that from 2019 to 2021, 25 percent of Delta Doctors worked in a primary care role and the remainder across more than 18 specialties.¹⁴⁸ Each Delta Doctor creates five full-time jobs within their clinic and office in addition to 3.4 full-time and part-time jobs within the communities where they work.¹⁴⁹

In addition to the Conrad 30 program and National Interest Waiver, regional initiatives such as the Appalachian Regional Commission, Delta Regional Authority, Southeast Crescent Regional Commission, and Northern Border Regional Commission have expanded the reach of efforts to increase capacity in underserved areas.¹⁵⁰ The Crescent Care Collaborative, begun in November 2022 to address a shortage of healthcare professionals, sponsored 185 physicians in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia in two years.¹⁵¹

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- 143 U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), "[Conrad 30 Waiver Program](#)"; William A. Kandel et al., [Immigration Options and Professional Requirements for Foreign Health Care Workers](#), Congressional Research Service Report No. R47528, (Washington, D.C.: CRS, April 28, 2023); Julie M. Lawhorn, [Federal Regional Commissions and Authorities: Structural Features and Function](#), Congressional Research Service Report No. R45997 (Washington, D.C.: CRS, July 31, 2025); Zimmer, "[Immigration as a solution to healthcare workforce shortages](#)." Federal visa waiver programs also include the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Exchange Visitor Program waivers and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs waivers. Information on both is limited but state health departments reference their usage.
- 144 Missouri Department of Health & Senior Services, [Health in Rural Missouri Biennial Report, 2022-2023](#), 72.
- 145 Texas Department of State Health Services, "[Texas Primary Care Office Needs Assessment](#)," March 2021, 53.
- 146 Cristie Duric, MPH, RRT and Kevin Wooddell, "[Physician National Interest Waiver Guidance March 2025](#)," Iowa Health and Human Services, March 2025
- 147 Delta Regional Authority, "[Delta Doctors](#)"; Corey Wiggins, "[Delta Regional Authority Written Testimony Regarding Regional Commissions: A Review of Federal Economic Development Program Effectiveness](#)," written testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management, Oct. 12, 2023.
- 148 Wiggins, "[Written Testimony Regarding Regional Commissions](#)."
- 149 Ibid.
- 150 Kathleen Campbell Walker, "[A State-Based Cure – Interested Government Agency J-1 Waivers for Physicians](#)," [Healthcare Michigan, Volume 41, No. 1](#). Jan. 19, 2024; Appalachian Regional Commission, "[J-1 Visa Waivers](#)"; Delta Regional Authority, "[Delta Doctors](#)"; Southeast Crescent Regional Commission, "[About Grants and Programs](#)"; Northern Border Regional Commission, "[NBRC J-1 Visa Waiver Program](#)." Accessed June 30, 2025. The Northern Border Regional Commission [2024 Annual Report](#) states progress in placing physicians through its new J-1 waiver program. In 2023, the consulting firm [Working Partners](#) reported it was conducting a comprehensive evaluation of the Appalachian Regional Commission's J-1 program; an update or public report is not available.
- 151 Jennifer Clyburn Reed, "[Testimony](#)," written testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, hearing "America's Regional Commissions: Sharing Best Practices in Regional and Economic Development," Sept. 18, 2024; Southeast Crescent Regional Commission, [Southeast Crescent Regional Commission Annual Report 2024](#) (2024).

In a best practice, some laws establishing alternative pathways for international medical graduates require data collection to monitor usage and outcomes.¹⁵² More survey and data collection on internationally trained professionals is critical to inform policy and program design.¹⁵³ Existing studies, however, indicate that licensing reform and the Conrad 30 program have benefitted communities without adversely affecting native-born workers. A study of California's 2014 law removing immigration status as a condition for licensure and permitting the use of ITINs in applications found that it expanded employment opportunities without displacing native-born workers.¹⁵⁴ Similarly, evidence from the Conrad 30 program, which has placed more than 18,000 international medical graduates in rural and underserved areas, shows it has not negatively impacted native-born physicians.¹⁵⁵ Physicians participating in the Conrad 30 program from 2019 to 2023 generated an estimated \$100 million in economic impact in North Carolina alone.¹⁵⁶

Despite this progress, further coordination and robust data collection are necessary to assess outcomes, ensure quality, and scale reforms. Best practices emerging from these efforts include aligning licensure reform and credential recognition with broader workforce development systems; investing in navigator and liaison roles to guide applicants; and modernizing state licensure statutes to reflect the diversity and depth of the international talent pool.

Alternative pathways for international medical graduates

The creation of alternative pathways for licensure for international medical graduates (IMG) is one of the biggest policy innovations for lowering licensure barriers for foreign-trained professionals since 2020. Eliminating medical residency requirements, combined with the rapid legislative consideration of such pathways in more than two-thirds of states, has created unprecedented momentum for integrating foreign-trained physicians into the labor market.

By 2036, the U.S. is projected to have a shortfall of 86,000 physicians, which could increase to 124,000 by 2034 if allocated funding for Graduate Medical Education medical residency slots is not fully implemented.¹⁵⁷ Alternative pathways to practice are a commonsense solution designed to send qualified doctors into communities with healthcare needs while ensuring patient safety.

Physician shortages will severely affect rural areas and underserved communities. More than 65 percent of Primary Care Health Professional Shortage Areas are located in rural areas, where 20

152 FSMB, "[States with Enacted and Proposed Additional Licensure Pathways](#)"; Sharif Krabti, "[How State and Local Efforts Are Leading the Way on Data Collection to Better Serve Immigrants and Refugees](#)," World Education Services, Oct. 2, 2024.

153 Korkmaz et al., [Bridging the Gap](#).

154 Bobby Chung, "[What Are the Effects of Allowing Undocumented Immigrants to Earn Occupational Licenses?](#)," The Center for Growth and Opportunity at Utah State University, 2023; S.B. 1159, 2013-14 Leg., Reg. Sess., ch. 752 (Cal. 2014).

155 Breno Braga et al., "[Migration Policy and the Supply of Foreign Physicians: Evidence from the Conrad 30 Waiver Program](#)," NBER Working Paper No. 32005 (Dec. 2023).

156 North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Rural Health, "[North Carolina J-1 Visa Waiver Program: Federal Calendar Year 2019 - 2023 Profile](#)."

157 GlobalData Plc., [The Complexities of Physician Supply and Demand: Projections from 2021 to 2036](#) (Washington, D.C.: Association of American Medical Colleges, March 2024). The National Center for Health Workforce Analysis projects a shortage of 187,130 physicians in 2037. National Center for Health Workforce Analysis, "[Physician Workforce: Projections, 2022-2037](#)," Nov. 2024.

percent of the U.S. population resides but only 10 percent of physicians practice.¹⁵⁸ Up to 202,800 physicians would have been needed in 2021 if Americans living in underserved areas, including rural communities, had been able to access healthcare on the same terms as those living in other parts of the country.¹⁵⁹

IMGs provide a ready-made supply of talented medical professionals who can serve these areas but are unable to practice due to licensing barriers.¹⁶⁰ Of the 263,000 underutilized immigrant healthcare workers in the U.S., approximately 165,000 are foreign-trained, including physicians and nurses, who are prevented from working in their field of training due to such barriers.¹⁶¹

B. Building foundational skills: English language learning and digital skills

In response to technological shifts and persistent labor needs — accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic — states have expanded access to adult education opportunities for the entire workforce, including immigrants, through virtual learning and other digital tools and the integration of digital skill building. As with licensure reforms, what began as an emergency response transformed the system.¹⁶² The expansion in online training has provided states with new channels to offer English-language and digital-skills instruction, which they have swiftly seized. States and employers have also expanded workplace learning programs to build employees' language and digital skills, boosting worker retention and career mobility.

Turning online learning into successful pathways to training, jobs, and advancement for English language learners has required access to reliable internet and digital devices and to training in foundational digital literacy skills. State strategies to increase access have focused on underserved communities and on language barriers. North Carolina's Digital Navigator and Digital Champion grant programs have focused on digital skills training, connectivity assistance, and device distribution to reach English language learners through community colleges, public libraries, workforce sites, and trusted nonprofits. Bilingual digital navigators have also served community colleges.¹⁶³ Washington's digital navigator program for the Seattle area provided connectivity support, distributed hotspots and laptops, and delivered digital skills training.¹⁶⁴ New Mexico reached immigrant communities through expanded broadband infrastructure for underserved and unserved areas.¹⁶⁵

158 National Center for Health Workforce Analysis, "[State of the Primary Care Workforce, 2024](#)," Nov. 2024; U.S. Census Bureau, "[Nation's Urban and Rural Populations Shift Following 2020 Census](#)," Dec. 29, 2022 (updated Dec. 29, 2022; March 10, 2023); Kelley Arredondo et al., "[Current Programs and Incentives to Overcome Rural Physician Shortages in the United States: A Narrative Review](#)," *Journal of General Internal Medicine* 38, suppl. 3 (June 20, 2023): 916–922.

159 GlobalData Plc., [The Complexities of Physician Supply and Demand](#).

160 Lawson Mansell and Cecilia Esterline, [Unlocking Potential: How States Can Remove Barriers for Internationally Trained Physicians](#) (Washington, D.C.: Niskanen Center, March 2025).

161 Batalova and Fix, "[As U.S. Health-Care System Buckles under Pandemic, Immigrant & Refugee Professionals Could Represent a Critical Resource](#)."

162 Alisa Belzer et al., "[From rapid emergency response to scaling and sustaining innovation: Adult foundational education in the time of COVID 19](#)," *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, no. 173–174 (June 2022): 81–91.

163 North Carolina Department of Information Technology, "[Digital Champion Grant Awards](#)"; North Carolina Department of Information Technology, "[Digital Navigator Grants Worth \\$4M to Help North Carolinians Gain Online Skills & Access](#)"; North Carolina State Board of Community Colleges, "[Allocations for Virtual Learning Community Centers \(FY 2025–26\)](#)," Attachment FC 08, May 16, 2025.

164 Elizabeth Moore, PhD., [Evaluation of the WDC Digital Navigator Program](#) (Prepared by Applied Inference for the Workforce Development Council of Seattle–King County) (March 2024).

165 New Mexico Office of the Governor, "[Governor announces broadband expansion funding for initial Connect New Mexico Pilot Program awardees](#)," Nov. 10, 2022; Connect New Mexico Council and New Mexico Office of Broadband Access and Expansion, [Connect New Mexico: New Mexico Broadband Access, Equity + Data Collection—Annual Report](#) (Oct. 2022).

Colorado established a suite of virtual approaches to enhance career-aligned language skills, digital literacy, and job services. Its Virtual Career-Aligned English as a Second Language pilot program provided free career-aligned English training in high-demand sectors, serving over 4,000 learners in less than two years.¹⁶⁶ Colorado expanded the program on renewal to provide free access to over 170 career-aligned English courses, online classes and workshops, and multilingual coaches providing one-on-one support.¹⁶⁷ Colorado also implemented a digital navigator pilot program, provided bilingual digital coaching services reaching rural communities, and launched a virtual job fair pilot, New Americans Virtual Connection to Work.¹⁶⁸

States and workforce providers have also embedded digital skills training into programming and have delivered standalone instruction for English language learners. Every year since 2020, Pennsylvania has funded Digital Literacy and Workforce Development Grants.¹⁶⁹ Programs have included integrated English as a Second Language (ESL) and digital skills training and foundational digital literacy classes. Some have also provided devices and connectivity access. New Jersey's Community Library Adult Literacy & Career Pathway Grant Program created additional access to digital literacy and career pathway training through community anchors.¹⁷⁰ The Texas Workforce Commission adopted curricula such as the DART curriculum for lower-level ESL learners, and statewide content standards to integrate digital skills training; piloted AI-powered learning tools; and made digital literacy curriculum licenses available for all adult education grantees and sub-grantees.¹⁷¹ The Texas adult education system has more than doubled its distance learning participation rate since 2019.¹⁷² Connecticut has used the DART curriculum while also providing educators with options to enhance digital skills for English language learners with advanced proficiency.¹⁷³

Responding to tight labor markets, employers have integrated English instruction and digital literacy training into work hours or hosted courses on-site before or after shifts. States and providers have also expanded workplace learning to meet employers' needs, customizing instruction to build skills, support retention, and open paths to job advancement for frontline workers and employees with limited English proficiency or less formal schooling.¹⁷⁴

Iowa created the Language Learners Job Training Program to lower language barriers and support job

166 Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, Office of New Americans, "[Virtual, Career-Aligned English as a Second Language Program](#)," 2024. Accessed June 30, 2025. Sharif Krabti, "[Bridging the Language Gap: Empowering Immigrant Professionals Through Contextualized English Programs](#)," World Education Services, Sept. 9, 2024.

167 Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, "[CDLE Renews the Virtual Career-Aligned English as a Second Language Program](#)," June 17, 2025.

168 [S.B. 22-440](#), 2022 Reg. Sess. (Colo. 2022); Colorado Office of the Governor, "[Lt. Governor Primavera Celebrates Anniversary of Colorado Digital Navigators Pilot Launch](#)," Oct. 14, 2024; Colorado Office of Lt. Governor, "[Digital Navigators](#)"; Colorado Workforce Development Council, "[Colorado Launches Career Navigation and Coaching Collaborative to Help Identify Career and Learning Opportunities](#)," March 23, 2023; Premier Virtual, "[New Americans Virtual Connection to Work](#)," Accessed June 30, 2025.

169 Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry, "[Shapiro Administration Awards Nearly \\$4.9 Million To 50 Organizations Boosting Digital Literacy Across Pennsylvania](#)," June 14, 2024; "[Shapiro Administration Announces Grant Funding to Enhance Digital-Literacy Programs, Helping Workers to Navigate Job Search Process](#)," Aug. 17, 2023; "[2022 Digital Literacy and Workforce Development Grant-Round 3 Awardees](#)"; "[2021-2022 Digital Literacy and Workforce Development Grant Awardees](#)"; "[2020 Digital Literacy & Workforce Development Grant Awardees](#)."

170 New Jersey State Library, "[Expanding Digital Literacy](#)."

171 Texas Workforce Commission, [Adult Education and Literacy Strategic Plan Progress Report: Fiscal Year 2024](#); [TWC Adult Education and Literacy Strategic Plan Progress Report Fiscal Year 2022](#); Glenda Rose and Denise Guckert, [A Foundational Digital Literacy ESL Curriculum](#), ver. 1.0 (College Station: Texas Center for the Advancement of Literacy & Learning [TCALL], Texas A&M University, Jan. 2023).

172 TWC, [Adult Education and Literacy 2024](#).

173 New London Adult & Continuing Education, "[Accomplishments](#)," New London Public Schools, May 2024; Digital ATDN, "[Digital Literacy Curricula](#)."

174 Workplace learning programs for employees can draw on a range of sources such as WIOA Title I Incumbent Worker Training, WIOA Title II AEFLA (English Language Acquisition/IELCE), employer self-funding, community college customized-training grants, nonprofit and philanthropic support, and other streams.

performance, recruitment, and retention.¹⁷⁵ Maine funded grants to expand workplace learning for English and digital skills, and California launched a Workforce Literacy Pilot Program that expanded its workplace learning program to reach more employees.¹⁷⁶ Lincoln Literacy collaborated with, as the organization states, “Nebraska’s largest manufacturer, Lincoln’s largest hotel, and the area’s largest healthcare provider” and other businesses to deliver work-aligned English-language and digital-literacy instruction for employees on-site and at various times for flexibility, including 7 a.m. classes for third-shift employees.¹⁷⁷ The Kansas Board of Regents piloted Accelerating Opportunity: Kansas (AO-K) @ Work, based on its flagship training program, Accelerating Opportunity: Kansas, to deliver customized training at the worksites of retail and service-sector employers and serve English language learners at a range of employers.¹⁷⁸ Kansas City Kansas Community College expanded a robust workplace English-language program started under AO-K @ Work to major employers and a local health system.¹⁷⁹

At Luke’s Lobster in Saco, Maine, workplace learning for frontline workers

The Westbrook, Maine, Adult Education Department partnered with Luke’s Lobster in nearby Saco to build an innovative workplace-based English language learning program serving the multilingual, shift-based staff working in its production facility. The workplace program used a virtual platform to accommodate staff schedules, which varied seasonally and according to the amount of product coming in from the boats

Online learning was accompanied by either in-person or virtual instruction, reflecting work schedules and employees’ moving from the company’s processing facility to working in its restaurant. Laptops were available for employees’ use at the production facility. New flexibilities in workforce development funding have enabled more workplace English-language instruction to reach frontline workers. Previously, funding performance metrics left little room for variations that would accommodate different styles of work. Alternative placements and workplace learning programs designed with employer-informed milestones make programs possible for employers with a shift-based workforce like Luke’s Lobster.¹⁸⁰

175 Mary Stroka, “Iowa to Spend \$5 million in ARPA funds to help businesses address workplace language barriers,” The Center Square, Oct. 5, 2022; Future Ready Iowa, “Iowa Language Learners Job Training Program.”

176 Maine Department of Education, “Maine DOE Adult Education Team Awards \$3.2 Million in Strengthening Maine’s Workforce Education and Training Grants,” Oct. 27, 2022; “Media Release: Maine DOE Awards Additional \$800,000 in ‘Strengthening Maine’s Workforce’ Education and Training Grants,” June 14, 2023; California Employment Training Panel, “Workforce Literacy Pilot Program; Employment Training Panel, “Guidelines for: Workforce Literacy Pilot Program.”

177 American Job Center Lancaster and Saunders Counties, PY22 Incumbent Worker Training Agreements (2023); American Job Center Lancaster and Saunders Counties, “Sector Strategies: Lincoln Manufacturing Council”; Lincoln Literacy, “Workplace Classes.”

178 Kansas Board of Regents, “Postsecondary Technical Education Authority–Agenda,” Oct. 8, 2021; “Postsecondary Technical Education Authority–Agenda,” Nov. 18, 2022.

179 Kansas City Kansas Community College, “Board Of Trustees Special Meeting,” Feb. 18, 2025; Board Of Trustees Special Meeting,” Nov. 14, 2023; Board Of Trustees Special Meeting, Sept. 19, 2023.

180 Maine Department of Education, “Maine DOE Adult Education Team Awards \$3.2 Million”; Luke’s Lobster, “2023 Wrapped”; interview with author.

Workplace learning for a uniform-supply company and laundry service in Texas

Responding to employer needs, a Texas Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) provider at the community college level designed English-language instruction and digital-literacy training for a commercial-uniform supply company and laundry service. The plant manager, transitioning to new digital systems and experiencing high staff turnover, asked for services to help employees increase their English proficiency and digital skills to improve retention. The AEL provider aligned language and digital-literacy instruction to the new electronic tracking and inventory equipment at the laundry facility and company operations. The AEL provider and plant manager agreed on a plan to track progress and formalized data sharing and responsibilities in a memorandum of understanding. The workplace program was designed to increase skills, improve retention, and create pathways for employees to advance within the facility.¹⁸¹

Multilingual preapprenticeship for certified nursing assistants in Lewiston, Maine

The Lewiston Adult Education program launched a preapprenticeship program in 2023 for Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA) using a virtual multilingual platform to integrate English skills with technical skills, career training, and digital literacy. Contextualized English courses are available on demand to support personalized instruction.

The course has three six-month pathways, each leading to an industry-recognized credential. Students study for certification in handling blood-borne pathogens, then as personal support specialists, and then prepare for the CNA exam. Eighty-five percent of participants have completed the full CNA training. Once a student passes the CNA exam, an employer hires them for a one-year apprenticeship. Thirty-five people have already received their CNA certifications and are still working with local employers. Lewiston Adult Education has expanded the program to the education and finance sectors, offering preapprenticeships in those fields to local adult English learners.¹⁸²

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, major employers, including Walmart, Chobani, Tyson, and Chipotle, offered workplace education opportunities for English language learners and continued to grow their programs after the pandemic began. Amazon added on-site and online programming in 2022.¹⁸³ Some companies offered a combination of virtual learning and on-site instruction. General Electric Appliances launched the Every

181 Texas Workforce Commission, Adult Education and Literacy, [“Texas Adult Education and Literacy Performance Guide: Employment, Training, and Educational Outcomes—Excerpt on MSGs 3, 4, and 5,”](#) TCALL (Texas Center for the Advancement of Literacy & Learning); see Texas Workforce Commission, [“Adult Education and Literacy Performance Guide: Education, Training, and Employment Outcomes,”](#) July 24, 2024.

182 EnGen, [“Case Study: Bolster Apprenticeship Pipelines With English Upskilling,”](#); Katie Brown, PhD, [“Champion Adult English Learners, Boost Apprenticeship Pipelines, Power Local Economies,”](#) CAEL Pathways Blog, Nov. 20, 2024; conversation with author.

183 Walmart, [“Live Better U,”](#) Walmart, [“Walmart Sees Significant Increase in the LBU Graduation Rate as More Associates Prepare for Future of Work,”](#) May 21, 2021; Jane Oates, [“Situation Analysis: Immigration and the Future of the Workforce,”](#) EnGen, 2022; Lois Johnson, [“Chobani Voxy Pilot Presented at Close It Summit,”](#) Workforce Development Institute, Nov. 14, 2019; Sarah Genter, [“Chobani Invests In Employees And Community,”](#) The Evening Sun, Feb. 2, 2024; Joe Deegan, [“Growing Talent from Within: A Business and Social Imperative,”](#) Jobs for the Future, July 7, 2021; Tyson Foods, [“Tyson Foods Celebrates One Year of Providing Tuition-Free Education for all U.S. Team Members,”](#) July 6, 2023; Chipotle, Guild Education, [“Explore Guild, Chipotle’s Education Benefit,”](#); Amazon, [“Amazon pays college tuition for front-line employees,”](#) Sept. 2, 2022; Marmi Lico, [“Breaking the Language Glass Ceiling: How Amazon Career Choice Propels Careers and Changes Lives through Language Learning,”](#) Amazon, March 28, 2024.

Voice program in Louisville, Kentucky, to address acute labor demand in manufacturing, offering on-site English training, a career path at the company, and multilingual ambassadors to assist new employees.¹⁸⁴ Taziki's Mediterranean Cafe, based in Birmingham, Alabama, and operating 90 locations across 18 states, adopted virtual English platforms to support its frontline workforce.¹⁸⁵ Early adopters, such as Minnesota-based Cambria, a manufacturer specializing in quartz countertops, hired an ESL instructor for on-site teaching during work hours even prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.¹⁸⁶ The company transitioned to virtual formats during the pandemic and returned to an on-site format afterward.

C. Increasing access to workforce training and services

Parallel with adult education efforts, states have increased immigrants' access to workforce development through direct measures and have established workforce plans that guided local and regional workforce boards in using passthrough funds. States have focused their programs on middle-skill occupations, industry-aligned instruction, work-based learning, and career pathways with stackable certifications, combined with delivery of career and support services. Partnerships have been crucial to workforce-development efforts, and the innovative use of funding significantly enhanced their reach. Leadership from state governments and agencies, reinforced by municipal agencies, the private sector, and local stakeholders, proved essential to expanding access.

States launched and expanded training programs in high-demand sectors, including healthcare, construction, hospitality, manufacturing, and early childhood education as well as in future-oriented fields in telecommunications and clean energy. Programs spanned apprenticeships, sector-based activities, and career pathways with stackable credentials. Some embedded wraparound services and offered bilingual instruction. New Mexico created a workforce training pilot program with monthly stipends to reduce barriers to successful participation, making it available to students regardless of immigration status.¹⁸⁷ The state also launched and expanded 45 workforce training programs for adult students, including English language learners, with plans to offer certificates like Broadband-5G to train students for careers in telecommunications.¹⁸⁸

A sector-based talent pipeline for semiconductors and advanced manufacturing in Boise, Idaho

Following Micron Technology's \$15 billion investment in a new facility in Boise, Idaho, supported by \$6.2 billion in CHIPS and Science Act funding, the company partnered with the College of Western Idaho (CWI) to design a Micron Technician Apprenticeship Program. In 2023, planning began for a preapprenticeship in mechatronics, which involved CWI's Career and Technical Education program, the Idaho Workforce Development Council, and the state Adult Education program, including services for English language learners.

184 Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board, Team Kentucky Education and Labor Cabinet, "[Kentucky Education and Workforce Collaborative Meeting Minutes](#)," Jan. 16, 2025; Amy Feldman, "[Hiring Refugees: How One Big Factory Did It](#)," *Forbes*, July 6, 2022; Kentucky Education & Workforce Collaborative, [Education & Workforce Collaborative Briefing Book](#) (Kentucky Workforce Innovation Board, Jan. 16, 2025); Kentucky Chamber of Commerce, "[Inclusive Workforce Summit—Speakers](#)."

185 Dale Buss, "[The Language of Success for Immigrants](#)," StrategicCHRO360, 2021; EnGen, "[Taziki's Invests in Workers with Innovative Skill-Building, Language Learning Program](#)," PR Newswire, Sept. 30, 2021.

186 Ashley Opina, "[Cambria Offers Language Classes to Non-English Speaking Employees](#)," *The Free Press*, Sept. 21, 2022.

187 H.B. 303, 2d Sess. (N.M. 2024); Auriella Ortiz, "[Gov. Lujan Grisham Signs Legislation Expanding Tuition-Free College, University Research and More](#)," New Mexico Higher Education Department, March 18, 2024; State Records Center and Archives, "[Title 5 Post-Secondary Education, Chapter 9 Adult Education, Part 2 Workforce Training Economic Support Pilot Program](#)."

188 Tripp Stelnicki, [New Mexico launching fleet of new programs for workforce training in adult education](#), New Mexico Higher Education Department, Aug. 19, 2024.

“Most of our students have refugee and immigrant backgrounds and have worked in engineering, math, and science-related fields in their home countries,” Jimmy Hallyburton, a pre-mechatronics instructor in the Integrated Education and Training Program at the College of Western Idaho, told the author. “With a little bit of college and career readiness training and modern mechatronics education, they will be ready to hit the floor running as they help fill gaps in the semiconductor and manufacturing fields.”

The pre-mechatronics program launched in 2024, supported by a sector grant from the Idaho Workforce Development Council to build an industry-aligned workforce. A digital navigator supports a broader statewide strategy to increase enrollment and access. The first cohort completed training in mid-2024; an additional cohort began in fall 2025; and another is planned for winter 2026. Graduates are expected to transition into either the Micron-CWI apprenticeship or CWI’s Advanced Mechatronics program. Additional career pathway strategies are under development in the semiconductor and manufacturing fields.¹⁸⁹

Wisconsin created a multilingual direct-care certification course, available to high school students, as part of a CNA career pathway.¹⁹⁰ Michigan expanded Registered Apprenticeship Program opportunities to English language learners.¹⁹¹ Utah partnered with a public-private industry initiative to pilot a manufacturing training program with wraparound services as part of the state’s “Return to Work” initiative.¹⁹² Massachusetts funded workforce programs to address the middle-skills gap and added career-aligned English to sector-based training programs.¹⁹³ Maine took a comprehensive approach, funding bridge, workplace learning, digital skills, and workforce training programs for English language learners that were offered in person and through virtual platforms. Its new clean energy workforce programs included immigrants as part of a strategy to tap new talent pipelines for a growing sector.¹⁹⁴

189 College of Western Idaho, “[Micron Names College of Western Idaho as ‘Core Education Partner’ in New Boise Expansion](#),” Sept. 1, 2022. Micron, “[US Expansion: Micron’s plans to bring leading-edge memory manufacturing to Idaho](#)”; “[Micron to Invest \\$15 Billion in New Idaho Fab, Bringing Leading-Edge Memory Manufacturing to the US](#),” Sept. 1, 2022; “[Micron and Trump Administration Announce Expanded U.S. Investments in Leading-Edge DRAM Manufacturing and R&D](#),” June 12, 2025. College of Western Idaho, “Pre-Mechatronics”; email with Jimmy Hallyburton, pre-mechatronics instructor, Integrated Education and Training Program, College of Western, Idaho, Nov. 4, 2025.

190 Wisconsin Department of Health Services, [Governor’s Task Force on the Healthcare Workforce Report](#); Wisconsin Department of Health Services, “[Certified Direct Care Professional Program Now Available in Spanish](#),” March 24, 2024; Wisconsin Department of Health Services, “[Certified Direct Care Professional Program Now Available in Hmong](#),” Jan. 13, 2025; Good Info News Wire, “[Wisconsin certified direct care professionals can now get free training & bonuses](#),” Upnorth News, Jan. 16, 2025.

191 Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity, “[Gov. Whitmer Announces Funding to Provide Life-changing Career Pathways Through Registered Apprenticeships](#),” Feb. 14, 2024.

192 Mary Lou Jay, “[Closing the Skilled Workforce Gap](#),” American Composites Manufacturers Association, May 24, 2024; Utah System of Higher Education, “[Return to Work](#),” Aug. 20, 2024; Joseph, “[Episode 93](#).”

193 Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, “[Healey-Driscoll Administration Awards \\$4.2 Million to Train and Place over 600 Workers in Industries Statewide](#),” Oct. 8, 2024; “[Healey-Driscoll Administration Awards \\$3.9 Million in Senator Kenneth J. Donnelly Workforce Success Grants](#),” Dec. 18, 2023. Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, [WCFY24 Annual Report](#).

194 [L.D. 1684](#), 130th Leg., 1st Spec. Sess. (Me. 2021); Maine Department of Education, “[Maine DOE Adult Education Team Awards \\$3.2 Million](#)”; “[Maine DOE Awards Additional \\$800,000](#),” Maine Department of Energy Resources, “[Maine Governor’s Energy Office Awards \\$2 Million to Clean Energy Workforce Training Programs](#),” July 30, 2024; Maine Governor’s Energy Office, “[Clean Energy Partnership Advisory Group Meeting](#),” Aug. 12, 2025.

Building a teacher pipeline through apprenticeship with Nevada Forward

Based at the University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV) College of Education, Nevada Forward is the state's first registered teacher apprenticeship program. Nevada Forward enables paraprofessionals, long-term substitute teachers, and school support staff to earn teaching credentials through grant-funded tuition. Participants maintain full-time employment while completing hybrid coursework and receive concierge support and success coaching. Postprogram support for three years addresses early-career attrition. The preapprenticeship program helps candidates complete general education requirements.

Nevada Forward has a nearly 98 percent graduation rate and 95 percent retention rate. By fall 2024, the program had registered more than 500 teacher apprentices and served over 1,100 students, helping to fill the state's 2,000 annual teacher vacancies. Many participants are first-generation college students. Around 70 percent come from communities historically underrepresented in the teaching profession, including Indigenous, rural, and immigrant communities, reflecting Nevada's student population, 14 percent of whom are English language learners.

With more than 90 percent of North Carolina's counties identified as Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas, the state's Departments of Health and Human Services and Commerce recommended expanding the behavioral health workforce pipeline to include immigrants.¹⁹⁵ Minnesota's Pathways to Prosperity (P2P) program funded bridge and career pathway programs leading to industry-recognized credentials serving English language learners.¹⁹⁶ Using P2P funding, the Rural Minnesota Concentrated Employment Program launched the "Next Step" grant program to support credentialing recognition and coursework for internationally trained professionals.¹⁹⁷

Community anchor institutions such as public libraries and community colleges have been a focal point. Iowa funded new programs for English language learners to advance workforce participation. Oregon expanded its Community College Career Pathways initiative, leading to new opportunities like a medical assisting career pathway.¹⁹⁸

Workforce agencies and training providers expanded programs to English language learners as part of overall efforts to close sector-specific skill gaps. Idaho providers introduced a bilingual English-Spanish CNA course; a preapprenticeship in mechatronics as part of a new Advanced Mechatronics Engineering Technology program; and a digital skills pathway to entrepreneurship and computer science.¹⁹⁹ Iowa piloted a Child Health, Safety, and Nutrition certificate program that connected successful participants to an early childhood education career

195 North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Commerce, "[Investing in North Carolina's Caregiving Workforce: Recommendations to strengthen North Carolina's nursing, direct care and behavioral health workforce](#)," Jan. 2024, 20.

196 Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, "[DEED Invests \\$13.6 Million in Training to Prepare Minnesotans to Enter High-Growth Industries](#)," Jan. 31, 2024.

197 Rural Minnesota Concentrated Employment Program, "[Pathways to Prosperity](#)" The Next Step Provides Education Funding for Residents with Foreign Degrees," May 24, 2024.

198 Iowa Workforce Development, "[519878 - FY2024 \(PY23\) ESL State Adult Education and Literacy Program](#)," Iowa Grants, July 14, 2023; Jennifer Purcell et al., "[Update: SB 1545 \(2022\) - Future Ready Oregon](#)," Joint Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Education, Higher Education Coordinating Commission, Jan. 30, 2025.

199 Stephanie Garibay, "We want to empower them: CSI created first bilingual CNA course," Idaho News 6, June 15, 2021; Idaho Workforce Development Council, [Idaho WIOA Combined State Plan, PYS 2024-2027](#) (215).

pathway.²⁰⁰ The Lincoln Manufacturing Council partnered with Lincoln Literacy to deliver an entry-level manufacturing class in Arabic and Kurdish, with stipends, childcare, transportation, and other supports.²⁰¹

Bilingual apprenticeship for early childhood educators in Charlotte, North Carolina

In response to Covid-19-fueled labor demand, Charlotte Bilingual Preschool started an apprenticeship program in 2021 to build a bilingual pipeline of early childhood educators (ECE). Partnering with Central Piedmont Community College, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, and Charlotte Works, the school offers paid apprenticeships and classroom experience with specialized ECE teacher training and coaching to complete college course requirements. Participants are assisted with translation and validation of foreign credentials; they also have the opportunity to complete a U.S. high school diploma or a GED. Some classes are offered in Spanish.

Graduates are qualified to be lead preschool teachers in licensed facilities in North Carolina. The apprenticeship program began with 12 people and has graduated 26 early childhood educators to date. In addition, the school's workforce development department has served more than 500 participants over the past four years, helping to prepare them for careers in early child education. More than 200 learners have obtained credentials to begin their ECE career pathway, and more than 95 have continued their education to earn certifications, associate and bachelor's degrees, and teaching licenses in the field.²⁰²

In South Dakota, RN apprenticeship a pathway for English language learners

In February 2025, South Dakota approved its first registered nursing apprenticeship program, designed to help non-English-speaking nurses overcome language barriers and pass licensing exams. Huron Regional Medical Center had launched an initial training cohort in May 2024. The apprenticeship offers two pathways: a standard course and one for internationally trained professionals and nurses learning English. The alternative pathway includes a medical language course for English language learners, peer supports for the NCLEX preparation class, and training alongside a veteran nurse.

South Dakota is projected to have a nearly 15 percent shortfall in nurses by 2030. For a smaller system like Huron Regional Medical Center, the apprenticeship program represents a strategic shift from costly international recruitment efforts to developing a local talent pipeline, particularly among immigrants who have been working in meatpacking plants or cleaning jobs despite their prior nursing education. It can also develop a talent pipeline of community members outside

200 Northeast Iowa Workforce Development Board, [Northeast Iowa PY22 Annual Report July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023](#); Hawkeye Community College, ["Integrated Education and Training \(IET\) Programs."](#)

201 American Job Center Lancaster and Saunders Counties, ["Sector Strategies"](#); Cassidy Arena, ["Arabic, Kurdish manufacturing class to address labor shortage,"](#) Nebraska Public Radio, Jan. 31, 2024; Caden Pearson, ["Nebraska: Building A Resilient Manufacturing Workforce, Industry Today,"](#) Industry Today, June 30, 2025.

202 Charlotte Bilingual Preschool, ["Workforce Development"](#); Lana Harris, ["That gap doesn't get smaller': Charlotte school working to create more bilingual teachers,"](#) WCNC Charlotte, Feb. 24, 2022; Nick de la Canal, ["Charlotte Bilingual Preschool will train more bilingual teachers with \\$210k in grants,"](#) WFAE, Feb. 22, 2022.

the traditional university and technical college system. By developing a workforce that reflects community demographics, Huron Regional Medical Center seeks to improve cultural competency and patient trust.²⁰³

In Wyoming, workplace learning program leads to a Certified Nursing Assistant pathway

In 2023, Central Wyoming College–Jackson (CWC) and St. John’s Health created an on-site CNA pathway for English language learners. They launched an “English for Healthcare Purposes” course for employees, which was taught concurrently with a workforce training program that led to a CNA pathway. In collaboration with CWC, St. John’s Health became a CNA test observation site, enabling students to take the CNA exam at the hospital.

For community members who were not hospital employees, the community college provided an on-ramp through its CWC–Jackson Bridge program. Seventeen English language learners from the community college enrolled in the workforce training program in fall 2024, with eight beginning the CNA training. The CWC–St. John’s partnership advanced the state’s workforce goal to “provide customized support and resources to meet the diverse needs of Wyoming employers and job seekers.” The workforce council reports that efforts are in progress to expand to other employers.²⁰⁴

Sector-based youth apprenticeships and adult pathways in Elkhart County, Indiana

Horizon Education Alliance (HEA), a nonprofit in Elkhart County, Indiana, coordinates innovative education and workforce programs aligned to regional labor needs. In 2019, HEA launched the state’s first youth apprenticeship program, through CareerWise Elkhart County. Since then, 200 high school students have entered into paid apprenticeships that enable students to earn high school credit, postsecondary credit, and an industry-recognized credential.

As of the start of the 2025–26 school year, 93 apprentices are working in eight different sectors including healthcare, legal services, advanced manufacturing, IT, and education. HEA provides career coaching in partnership with high schools and works with employers to design apprenticeships that align training with hiring needs. Apprenticeships are registered with the U.S. Department of Labor and lead to journeyworker certificates as well as industry-recognized certifications.

HEA also offers virtual bilingual instruction for high school equivalency degrees, serving a range

203 Huron Regional Medical Center, “HRMC to Launch Three New Apprenticeships,” Nov. 24, 2024; Makenzie Huber, “A South Dakota city is pioneering nurse apprenticeships for English-as-second-language residents,” Sioux Falls Live, May 07, 2025; Nurse.org Staff, “Travel Nurse Leads Nurse Apprentice Program for Foreign-Trained Nurses in SD,” Nurse.org, May 16, 2025; Madison Troyer, “States that will need nurses the most by 2030, Nursing Education,” Nursing Education, updated Jan. 19, 2024; Catherine Burger, “The States with the Largest Nursing Shortages,” July 23, 2025; Mariah Taylor, “‘A missed opportunity’ for small systems needing nurses,” Becker’s Hospital Review, May 8th, 2025.

204 Wyoming Community College Commission, [2023 -2024 Annual Partnership Report](#); St. John’s Health, [Community Benefit Report and Implementation Plan](#), (Oct. 2024); Wyoming Department of Workforce Services, [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\): Wyoming Annual Narrative Report, Program Year 2023 \(July 1, 2023, to June 30, 2024\)](#); Central Wyoming College, [“Central Wyoming College announces open enrollment for ESL classes,”](#) Oct. 25, 2024.

of adult learners including internationally trained professionals, and has offered bilingual, hybrid training programs for adults leading to industry-recognized certifications in manufacturing and related fields. Collaborating with the Labor Institute for Training, a nonprofit workforce intermediary, HEA supported development of the Growing Opportunities in America for Latinos initiative, a bilingual, hybrid manufacturing bridge program leading to an industry-recognized credential.

The program addressed the manufacturing skills gap in the region and underemployment among Latinos in Elkhart County. Participants received Chromebooks to do coursework online, which they could keep after completing the course. Students without household internet used public WiFi at restaurants, cafes, and public libraries. In addition to technical skills, coursework covered transferable skills like communication and teamwork.²⁰⁵

Early adopter expanding healthcare apprenticeships in Baltimore metropolitan area

In 2022, the Baltimore Alliance for Careers in Healthcare (BACH) received a \$3.88 million federal grant through the U.S. Department of Labor's Apprenticeship Building America initiative to establish a registered apprenticeship hub to increase investment in healthcare apprenticeships and improve access to them for underrepresented populations and underserved communities.

BACH is the sponsorship intermediary for Maryland's first competency-based registered apprenticeship program. Maryland's Skilled Immigrant Task Force contributed to the pilot program, which launched its first cohort in 2017 to provide employees opportunities for advancement and to recruit candidates from an untapped pipeline of skilled immigrants. Unlike a traditional apprenticeship, which requires a set number of on-the-job training and classroom hours, a competency-based model requires demonstrating proficiency in certain skills to progress

Apprentices receive paid, on-the-job training while completing coursework. BACH provides a career coach throughout the program, and participants are connected with support services at their employer and the school offering technical classes. Graduates apply for registered apprenticeships in high-demand roles, which to date include environmental care supervisor, surgical technologist, central sterile processing technician, licensed practical nurse, and medical assistant. In its most recent survey, BACH reported that 100 percent of respondents retained employment after completing their apprenticeships.²⁰⁶

205 Horizon Education Alliance, "[World Class Education and Training in Northern Indiana](#)"; Carnegie Corporation of New York, "[CareerWise Elkhart County: Apprenticeship Program Brings Economic Hope to Indiana](#)," Aug. 9, 2024; CareerWise Elkhart County, "[Occupations](#)"; Labor Institute for Training, "[Labor Institute for Training \(LIFT\)](#)"; Jobs for the Future, "[GOAL PROFILE: Horizon Education Alliance](#)"; LIFT, "[Category: GOAL Profiles](#)."

206 Baltimore Alliance for Careers in Healthcare (BACH), "[Apprenticeship](#)"; Maryland Department of Labor, "[Governor Moore Announces \\$23 Million in Federal Funding to Expand Registered Apprenticeships and Workforce Development in Maryland](#)," Aug. 20, 2024; James Bartlett and Karen Kahn, "[Filling Critical Positions and Increasing Workforce Diversity through Registered Apprenticeships: A Case Study Of The Baltimore Alliance for Careers in Healthcare](#)," National Fund for Workforce Solutions; Maryland Department Of Labor, Maryland Combined Wioa State Plan 2020-2024; Lauren E. Gilwee and Amanda Olmstead, [Annual Report](#) (prepared for Maryland Skilled Immigrant Task Force, Spring 2018); Michel Morris, "[Johns Hopkins Environmental Care Supervisors Earn While They Learn](#)," John Hopkins Medicine, Feb. 10, 2021; Jobs for the Future, "[What to Know about Competency-Based Apprenticeship Programs](#)," April 2, 2020.

In North Dakota healthcare, an early adopter in employer-driven workforce training

Bethany Retirement Living, a Christian nonprofit long-term care provider in Fargo, North Dakota, launched an in-house CNA training course in 2012 in response to staffing needs. The state-certified course is free and open to the public, with participants responsible only for a \$100 CNA certification exam fee. Training is delivered by Bethany-employed instructors. Bethany estimates it has trained over 500 CNA students since offering its first class. It has expanded the number of training cohorts over time to meet its staffing demand, and the course is regularly oversubscribed.

Approximately 40 percent of Bethany staff are foreign born, and about one-third are New Americans who either arrived in Fargo or moved from elsewhere in the United States. Free ESL classes at the Fargo Adult Learning Center help prepare people for the CNA training and certification. When possible, Bethany informally supports English acquisition on the job by pairing new hires with co-workers who speak their language. It also offers staff career-aligned English-language courses through a virtual platform.²⁰⁷

A track record for inclusive workforce development at Cardinal IG Fargo in North Dakota

Cardinal IG Fargo in North Dakota, one of Cardinal Glass Industries' 43 plants nationwide, employs 347 people, 70 percent of whom were born outside the U.S., including two-thirds of team leaders and four of the 14 senior leaders. Over the past 27 years, the company has championed an approach that prioritizes ability over language proficiency, ensuring that every qualified candidate has a fair chance. The multilingual master trainer program plays a crucial role in onboarding new hires, pairing them with experienced teammates who speak their preferred language to support the learning process. Within six to eight weeks, new hires transition to independent roles, and many achieve near-fluency in English within six to 12 months. Cardinal IG Fargo encourages employees to seek promotions based on their skills while providing language support as needed. Cardinal IG Fargo's structured, language-accessible training is integrated into safety protocols, with the Fargo facility holding top safety certifications.²⁰⁸

States have also pursued systemic reforms to align hiring practices with real-world skills and competencies, reducing credentialing barriers for skilled and experienced workers, including immigrants. The Alabama Talent Triad developed a statewide, skills-based hiring platform that integrated with its workforce system.²⁰⁹ Over 25 states and Puerto Rico have issued formal policy directives to expand skills-based hiring and remove unnecessary degree requirements for government jobs.²¹⁰ The Office of Global Michigan piloted the Career Connector program to recruit internationally trained immigrants into the state workforce. The

207 Bethany Retirement Living, "[Bethany Retirement Living Fargo ND](#)"; "[CNA Training Course](#)"; interview with author.

208 Cardinal Industries, "[Cardinal IG Fargo](#)"; interview with author.

209 Alabama Works, "[Alabama Talent Triad](#)." Accessed June 30, 2025.

210 National Governors Association, *Empowering Progress: Harnessing Skills-Based Strategies to Drive Public Sector Excellence* (Feb. 6, 2025).

program helped identify systemic hiring barriers and led to a guide of best-practice recommendations for hiring managers and human resources staff.²¹¹

In Alabama, building an inclusive, skills-based talent pipeline

In 2018, Alabama Governor Kay Ivey established the Governor's Office of Education and Workforce Transformation to align the state's education and workforce systems. Goals included increasing labor market participation; creating career pathways aligned with industry demand; and surpassing the state's goal of adding 500,000 workers with postsecondary credentials to the workforce by 2025. Core to these goals are building a skills-based pipeline and ensuring all Alabamians can overcome barriers to employment. To achieve both, the state identified attainment goals, including "youth who aged out of foster care; English language learners; individuals with low levels of literacy; unemployed or underemployed Alabamians; and low-income Alabamians." In turn, Alabama links the development of this inclusive talent pipeline to the Alabama Talent Triad, a comprehensive platform to connect state residents with employment opportunities through skills-based hiring and learning and employment records. Open to all state residents, the Alabama Talent Triad can connect eligible immigrant job seekers to employment opportunities. Eligible participants in the state's workforce development system, such as English language learners, can also enroll in the platform.²¹²

States have prioritized services and wraparound supports to boost participation. North Dakota added career navigators at American Job Centers and requested funding for translation services related to the recognition of foreign credentials.²¹³ The Michigan Global Talent Initiative offered services for internationally trained professionals through Michigan workforce centers, while Colorado's local workforce centers added career

211 Office of Global Michigan, [FY 2023 Report to the Legislature](#) (Lansing: Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity, January 31, 2024); Trevor Shealy, "Promoting Immigrant and Refugee Workforce Inclusion: In Michigan, State Government Takes the Lead," World Education Services, March 4, 2024.

212 Michael Tomberlin, "Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey: Workforce Development Is 'Very Clear Need' That Requires Attention," Alabama News Center, Jan. 29, 2019; Alabama Community College System, "Memorandum: The Governor's Office of Education and Workforce Transformation (GOEWT)" (official memorandum, Montgomery, AL: Alabama Community College System, May 15, 2019); Office of the Governor of Alabama, "Governor Kay Ivey Announces 'Success Plus' Initiative to Prepare State's Workforce," May 14, 2018; Business Education Alliance of Alabama, [Forging Alabama's Future: Improving Educational Attainment and Workforce Development](#), prepared by the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama (Montgomery, AL: Business Education Alliance of Alabama, Jan. 2022); Lieutenant Governor's Commission on 21st Century Workforce, [Alabama Workforce Development: Accelerating the State's Economic Growth](#), prepared by Economic Leadership LLC (Montgomery, AL: Office of the Lieutenant Governor of Alabama, Feb. 2020); Kay Ivey and David Ige, "Alabama and Hawaii Focus on Providing Job Opportunities in the Post-Pandemic Economy," U.S. News & World Report, June 7, 2021; Alabama Governor's Office of Education and Workforce, C-BEN, and EBSCOed, "Issue 01: Building a Talent Marketplace – A Playbook for States," Alabama Talent Playbook, April 8, 2024; Alabama Works, [Alabama Talent Triad](#); Eric G. Mackey, "Memorandum: Alabama Talent Triad System" (official memorandum, Montgomery, AL: Alabama State Department of Education, Sept. 6, 2024); LER Ecosystem Map, [LER Ecosystem](#); Alabama Works, "Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA): Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth Eligibility," July 20, 2021; U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, "Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 10-23, Change 2: Work Authorization Verification in Grant Programs Administered by the Employment and Training Administration," July 10, 2025; Learn & Work Ecosystem Library, "Alabama Talent Triad," last updated March 13, 2025.

213 North Dakota Fargo Workforce Center, "New American Enrollment Program," Business Services, Job Service-Fargo Quarterly Newsletter, June 2024; North Dakota Department of Commerce, [North Dakota Workforce Development](#).

navigators for their immigrant communities.²¹⁴ Maine's Peer Workforce Navigator Program funded programs serving immigrant communities, including weekly clinics, reaching more than 1,000 participants annually.²¹⁵ The Colorado Rural Workforce Consortium provided digital coaching services in English and Spanish.²¹⁶ Connecting Colorado, the state's online labor exchange and portal for virtual employment services, offered job seekers the option to self-identify as "New Americans" when seeking services. The state used the data to improve participation in workforce centers and services and inform agencywide policy.²¹⁷

Funding flexibility has been key. Texas adult education providers reported nearly \$200,000 in transportation assistance to support learner participation since 2021.²¹⁸ Programs in states including Alaska, Georgia, Kansas, Michigan, Ohio, and Texas allowed providers to use funds for credential evaluation support to expedite the transition of internationally trained professionals into the labor market or supportive services like childcare and/or transportation to facilitate participation.²¹⁹

Nonprofit partners provided core workforce services, training, and capacity building that helped fill gaps. Nebraska's Career Ladder assisted internationally trained professionals with career coaching and training navigation.²²⁰ The national Welcome Back Centers network offered targeted support for internationally trained health professionals.²²¹ The St. Louis Mosaic Project, Portland (Maine) Professional Connections, and the International Institute of Buffalo provided professional networking opportunities.²²² Organizations such as Upwardly Global offered state-specific licensing guides and peer-to-peer job readiness support.²²³ World Education Services, Synergy Texas, the Teacher Bridge Project, and the Immigrant Healthcare Workforce Learning Lab built practitioner capacity to better serve internationally trained professionals and

214 MGTI, "[Michigan Global Talent Initiative](#)"; World Education Services, "[Workforce Navigation Programs Fostering Inclusive Economies across States](#)," Sept. 3, 2024; Michigan Works! Association, "[Michigan Works! Association](#)." Accessed June 30, 2025.

215 State of Maine Department of Labor, "[Maine Department of Labor Launches Peer Workforce Program to Connect Maine People to Jobs and Training](#)," March 22, 2022; Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan, "[Peer Workforce Navigator Program](#)"; Prosperity ME, "[Workforce Clinic](#)." Accessed June 30, 2025.

216 Colorado Workforce Development Council, "[Colorado Launches Career Navigation and Coaching Collaborative to Help Identify Career and Learning Opportunities](#)," March 23, 2023.

217 Workforce Colorado Connecting Colorado, "[Welcome To Connecting Colorado](#)"; Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, "[Office of New Americans Annual Report 2021](#)"; Krabti, "[How State and Local Efforts Are Leading the Way](#)."

218 TWC, "[Adult Education and Literacy 2024](#)."

219 On August 13, 2025, the U.S. Department of Education rescinded "[Program Memorandum OCTAE 24-3](#)" permitting use of funds "to pay for the costs of child and dependent care and transportation when adult learners need this assistance to participate in adult education and literacy programs to advance their educational and career goals." Nicholas J. Moore, "[OCTAE Program Memorandum 25-4: Rescission of Certain Program Memoranda](#)" (official memorandum, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, Aug. 13, 2025); Amy Loyd, "Use of Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Funds for Participant Child and Dependent Care and Transportation Costs – Frequently Asked Questions" (official memorandum, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, Jan. 31, 2024). Division of Employment and Training Services, "[Alaska Adult Education Program Supportive Services Technical and Procedural Guide](#)," updated May 2024; Technical College System of Georgia, Office of Adult Education, "[Child/Dependent Care and Transportation Policy Fiscal Year 2026](#)"; Kansas Board of Regents, "[Kansas WIOA Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act \(AEFLA\)](#)"; Michigan Department of Labor & Economic Opportunity, "[Allowable Cost Policy](#)," Talent Development Division Adult Education, July 1, 2025; Ohio Aspire, "[Ohio Aspire SFY26 Integrated Education and Training Policy July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026](#)"; Courtney Arbour, "[Implementing Programs, Activities, and Services for English Language Learners - Update](#)," Texas Workforce Commission, July 21, 2021.

220 Career Ladder, "[Career Ladder Resource Hub](#)." Accessed June 30, 2025. World Education Services, "[Lincoln, NE: Creating a 'Ladder' for Immigrant & Refugee Inclusion with SIIP](#)," May 31, 2024.

221 Welcome Back Initiative, "[About the Welcome Back Initiative](#)." Accessed June 30, 2025. Walder Foundation, "Connecting the Dots," March 2, 2023.

222 St. Louis Mosaic Project, "[St. Louis Mosaic Project](#)"; Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce, "[Portland Professional Connections](#)"; International Institute of Buffalo, "[The International Institute of Buffalo and Buffalo Leadership Partner to Provide Mentorships to Immigrants, Refugees and Asylees](#)," Nov. 2, 2022. Accessed June 30, 2025.

223 Upwardly Global, "[Career Coaching](#)." Accessed June 30, 2025.

frontline workers.²²⁴

To sustain and scale training programs, states have deployed innovative funding models. Massachusetts created a Workforce Investment Trust Fund, financed by sports wagering revenue, to fund multilingual job-skills training, adult literacy, and English language learning programs. New Jersey guaranteed a minimum annual allocation for the community college-led Basic Skills program, which includes ESL and other foundational courses benefiting immigrant workers.²²⁵ Nevada used surplus TANF and SNAP Employment & Training funds and Idaho leveraged ORR Refugee Career Pathways grants for credential evaluations.²²⁶

Local innovation in workforce delivery and funding: San Antonio Ready to Work

Launched in May 2022, San Antonio Ready to Work is a workforce program backed by city taxpayers to help unemployed and low-income city residents land quality jobs aligned with high-demand occupations. Return to Work is funded in part by an 0.125 percent sales tax approved by city residents in 2020; the sales tax will be collected through December 2025. San Antonio City residents accepted into the program, including qualifying immigrants, receive end-to-end coaching for training, education, and job placement and wraparound supports. Return to Work operates through a community network of partners and uses the Talent Pipeline Management framework to align workforce development with in-demand and high-growth occupations. An October 2023 independent analysis estimated that Return to Work will return \$61 to the local economy for every dollar invested in the program, yielding \$1.7 billion.²²⁷

Leadership from state governments and agencies, reinforced by municipal agencies, the private sector, and local stakeholders, has been essential to expanding access. Alaska, North Dakota, Massachusetts, and Michigan prioritized the inclusion of immigrant workers in their workforce strategies.²²⁸ Maine's 10-year strategic economic plan positioned immigrant workers as key to long-term economic growth.²²⁹ Efforts begun shortly before the Covid-19 pandemic to grow a credentialed workforce contributed momentum. Michigan's Sixty by 30 strategic plan to increase the number of credentialed adults in the workforce incorporated immigrant talent.²³⁰ Alabama's goal to increase the number of workers with postsecondary credentials identified English

224 World Education Services, "[Strengthening Immigrant Inclusion Program](#)," April 4, 2025; Synergy Texas, "[Resources and Networking for Internationally Trained Professionals](#)"; World Education Services, "[Pathways to Teaching for Immigrants and Refugees](#)," March 16, 2022; National Fund for Workforce Solutions, "[2023 Immigrant Healthcare Workforce Learning Lab](#)," Nov. 1, 2022. Accessed June 30, 2025.

225 H. 5164, § 18, 192d Gen. Ct. (Mass. 2022); New Jersey Business and Industry Association, "Legislation Committing \$3 Million Annually for Workforce Training Goes to Governor," June 30, 2021; New Jersey Council of County Colleges, "[Free Skills Training Ensures Your Economic Growth](#)."

226 World Education Services, "Advancing Immigrant Inclusion: A Practical Guide to Obtaining Federal and State Funding to Pay for Credential Evaluations." Accessed June 30, 2025.

227 City of San Antonio, Workforce Development, "[San Antonio Ready to Work](#)"; City of San Antonio, "[San Antonio Ready to Work](#)"; Julie Moreno, "[Watch: City leaders announce enrollment for open 'Ready to Work' job training, education program](#)," KSAT, May 16, 2022; City of San Antonio, "[Return on Investment Study Reveals Ready to Work Program Impact](#)," Oct. 3, 2023; greater:SATX, "[TPM: Solving Regional Workforce Needs](#)"; U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, "[Talent Pipeline Management](#)."

228 Alaska Workforce Investment Board, "[Alaska's Workforce Future](#)," March 2025; ND Workforce Development Council, "[Report of Recommendations](#)," Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, "[Driving Workforce Development through Collaboration](#)," Massachusetts Labor and Workforce Blog, Sept.14, 2023; Michigan Department of Labor & Economic Opportunity, Michigan Economic Development Corporation, Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement and Potential, "[The Michigan Statewide Workforce Plan](#)," Accessed June 30, 2025.

229 Maine Department of Economic & Community Development, "[Maine's Economic Development Strategy](#)," Accessed June 30, 2025; Maine Department of Economic & Community Development, "[Economic Development Strategy: THE 2024 RESET](#)," (Jan. 2024).

230 State of Michigan, "[Sixty by 30 Strategic Plan](#)," Accessed June 30, 2025; Nargis Rahman, "[Global Detroit Leader on How to Expand Immigrant Talent in Michigan](#)," Detroit Public Radio, May 9, 2025.

language learners as one of the target populations.²³¹ Georgia’s Senate and House legislative study reports identified policy solutions for growing the workforce through immigrant participation.²³²

In Michigan, Sixty by 30

The Michigan Global Talent Initiative is on track to add over 120,000 college-educated immigrants to the state’s workforce as part of Michigan’s “Sixty by 30” goal that 60 percent of work-age adults hold a college degree or professional credential by 2030. The Michigan Global Talent Initiative works to attract, retain, credential, and place immigrant, international student, and refugee workers in the Michigan workforce.²³³

Offices of New Americans in Colorado, North Dakota, Utah, and Maine promoted strategies to integrate immigrant talent into their statewide pipelines.²³⁴ Nebraska’s Chamber Foundation recommended that chambers of commerce coordinate with nonprofits to create the “most welcoming and ready state for immigrants.”²³⁵ Maine’s Chamber endorsed the state’s efforts to expand language and workforce training for new Mainers, and Indiana’s Chamber Foundation set retention of international student graduates with STEM degrees as a strategic priority.²³⁶ Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Columbus, Ohio, collaborated with chambers of commerce and local nonprofits on tools to connect businesses with internationally trained professionals.²³⁷ Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, collaborated with The Welcoming Center to enhance the capacity of businesses to hire immigrant workers.²³⁸

D. Recruiting and retaining immigrant talent

As discussed, some states have innovated their domestic recruitment and retention strategies to target immigrant talent already in the United States. Strategies have focused on leveraging the skills of international students trained at U.S. institutions, immigrant entrepreneurs, international medical graduates, and other immigrants already here.

231 Governor Kay Ivey and Governor David Ige, “[Alabama and Hawaii Focus on Providing Job Opportunities in the Post-Pandemic Economy](#),” USA Today, June 7, 2021.

232 Georgia State Senate Office of Policy & Legislative Analysis, [Final Report of the Senate Study Committee on Expanding Georgia’s Workforce \(SR275\)](#) (2023); George State House of Representatives, [Study Committee on Innovative Ways to Maximize Global Talent Final Report](#) (Nov. 15, 2021).

233 MGTI, “[2024 Census Immigration Data](#)”; State of Michigan, “[Sixty by 30 Strategic Plan](#); Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, [Advancement, and Potential](#), “[Sixty by 30](#).”

234 Colorado Office of New Americans, “[Global Talent Task Force](#)”; North Dakota Department of Commerce, “[Global Talent Office](#)”; Governor’s Office, “[Utah’s Center for Immigration and Integration](#)”; State of Maine Governor’s Office of Policy Innovation and the Future, “[Maine Office of New Americans](#).” Accessed June 30, 2025.

235 Economic Leadership and NE Chamber Foundation, [Immigration and America’s Workforce Shortage: A Nebraska Challenge in Need of a National Solution](#) and [Nebraska Economic Competitiveness Assessment 2024](#) (Jan.2024).

236 Ben Gilman, “[Testimony in Support of L.D. 1684, ‘An Act To Strengthen Maine’s Workforce by Expanding English Language Acquisition and Workforce Training Programs](#),” written testimony before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, Maine Legislature, May 13, 2021; Indiana Chamber Foundation, [Indiana Prosperity 2035 – A Vision for Economic Acceleration](#) (Aug. 2023).

237 City of Tulsa, New Tulsans Initiative, “[Flourish Tulsa Hiring Guide for Internationally Trained Professionals](#),” 2022; Krystal S. Reyes, “[Flourish Tulsa Supporting Internationally Trained Tulsans Access Careers](#),” City of Tulsa Mayor’s Office of Resilience and Equity, July 11, 2024; Columbus Chamber of Commerce, “[An Employee Guide to Hiring Global Talent in Central Ohio](#).” Accessed June 30, 2025.

238 City of Philadelphia, “[City and Welcoming Center Launch Citywide Immigrant Workforce Initiative](#),” Jan. 15, 2020; The Welcoming Center, “[Engaging Immigrant Talent Toolkit: Successfully integrating Immigrants into the Workplace](#).” Accessed June 30, 2025.

Some states have tapped a pipeline of skilled, work-ready, U.S.-trained international students through the federal Optional Practical Training (OPT) pathway.²³⁹ North Dakota's Workforce Development Council and Global Talent Office promoted the OPT pathway, especially in STEM fields.²⁴⁰ Michigan's regional talent retention and attraction program invested in a new program to support immigrant talent, including retaining students on OPT and Curricular Practical Training (CPT) pathways. The Global Talent Retention Initiative connected employers with international student talent.²⁴¹ Indiana's Chamber Foundation set a goal to retain 25 percent of international student graduates in STEM fields. Universities in Iowa, Indiana, and elsewhere promoted a pipeline of STEM-ready international students for employers to leverage through the OPT pathway.²⁴²

Other states have attracted and retained immigrant entrepreneurs through university-based H-1B visa sponsorship, incubating businesses leading to job creation and revenue for the states. Global Entrepreneur-in-Residence programs enable universities to sponsor immigrant entrepreneurs through uncapped H-1B visas.²⁴³ Global EIR programs launched or expanded in California, Connecticut, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, Washington, and northeast Ohio.²⁴⁴ New Jersey aimed its program at AI innovation. Connecticut's largest business organization endorsed the program as an opportunity to retain talent and boost economic development.²⁴⁵ New York announced funding for new Global EIR programs along with the creation of a virtual Immigrant Entrepreneur Center.²⁴⁶ Michigan's program, run by Global Detroit, has generated over 170 jobs and \$28 million in investment since 2019.²⁴⁷

Among other strategies that states have pursued to maximize immigrant talent already in the United States, North Dakota and Utah delivered resources and programming to help employers identify and hire skilled immigrant workers.²⁴⁸ The Michigan Global Talent Initiative implemented an immigrant talent strategy to help the state achieve its workforce goal of 60 percent of work-age adults holding postsecondary creden-

239 U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), "Optional Practical Training (OPT) for F-1 Students."

240 North Dakota Job Service, [WIOA Annual Report PY 2023](#) (2023)(reporting that recruitment and retention strategy included employer education on "Exploring International Student Pathways to Maximize Your Talent Strategy"); Foster LLP, "[Employing F-1 International Students Webinar](#)," Sept. 7, 2023; North Dakota Job Service, "[ND Global Talent Connect-Virtual Job Fair for International Students](#)," May 1, 2025; North Dakota Global Talent Office, "[Global Talent, Local Impact: Strategies for Retaining OPT Employees](#)," Nov. 21, 2024; North Dakota Global Talent Office, "[Optional Practical Training \(OPT\)](#)."

241 Michigan Growth Office, "[Michigan's Growth Office Awards Over \\$660K to Support the Creation of Five Regional Talent Retention and Attraction Programs](#)," Michigan Economic Development Office, Oct. 17, 2024; Michigan Economic Development Office, "[Make MI Home](#)"; Make My Move, "[West Michigan Rooted](#)"; West Michigan Works, West Michigan Works! (WMW) Workforce Development Board (WDB) Meeting," Oct. 24, 2024; Global Detroit, "[Global Talent Retention Initiative](#)"; Office of Global Michigan, [Office of Global Michigan FY 2024-2025 Report to the Legislature](#) (Jan. 31, 2025); MGTI, [Filling Michigan's Talent Gap](#).

242 Indiana Chamber Foundation, [Indiana Prosperity 2035 – A Vision for Economic Acceleration](#) (Aug. 2023); Iowa State University Center for Industrial Research and Service, "Unlock Short-Term Foreign-Born Engineering Expertise: How Iowa Companies Can Benefit from International Student Talent," Sept. 25, 2024; Purdue University, Mitchell Daniels School of Business, "[Employer Guide: Hiring International Students](#)," May 2025.

243 Connor O'Brien, "[How more states and cities can retain immigrant entrepreneurs](#)," Economic Innovation Group, May 17, 2024.

244 UC San Diego Innovation, "[Global Entrepreneur-In-Residence](#)"; [S.B. 250](#), 2024 Gen. Assemb., Reg. Sess. (Conn. 2024), Connecticut General Assembly; Time Keenan, "[Global Detroit Report: Place More Foreign-Born Startup Founders at Universities - DBusiness Magazine](#)," DBusiness Magazine, Aug. 12, 2024; New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, "[Notice of Fund Availability for Fiscal Year 2025: Global Entrepreneurs in Residence Pilot Program](#)," 2024; Washington Workforce Training and Education Coordination Board, "Workforce Budget Provisos (Operating and Transportation Budgets) 2024," March 21, 2024; Global Cleveland, "[Global Entrepreneur in Residence - Global Cleveland](#)."

245 New Jersey Institute of Technology, "[NJIT Awarded in State's Pilot Global Entrepreneurs-in-Residence Program](#)," Jan. 16, 2025; [S.B. 250](#), 2024 Gen. Assemb., Reg. Sess. (Conn. 2024), Connecticut General Assembly; Ashley Zane, "[Testimony in Support of S.B. 250](#)," written testimony before the Commerce Committee, Connecticut General Assembly, March 5, 2024.

246 Office of Governor Kathy Hochul, "[Governor Hochul Announces Plan to Grow and Strengthen New York's Economy](#)," Jan. 9, 2024; Empire State Development, "[New York Global Entrepreneurs Program, RFA](#)," Sept. 12, 2025; New York State, Empire State Development, "Immigrant Entrepreneurs: Get the Help Your Business Needs to Succeed in New York State."

247 Global Detroit, [Global Entrepreneur in Residence \(Global EIR\) Program: 2024 Impact Report](#) (2024).

248 Utah Center, "[State of Oklahoma UCII Presentation](#)"; Joseph, "[Episode 93](#)"; ND Department of Commerce, "[Global Talent Office](#)."

tials. The North Dakota Global Talent Office connected work-authorized immigrants from New York with employers in the state; they received virtual support from a partner organization for 60 days after relocation to North Dakota.²⁴⁹ The Global Talent Office Grant Program invested in long-term retention through initiatives advancing workforce and community integration.²⁵⁰

Through visa waiver programs such as the Conrad-30 waiver, regional waivers, and the National Interest Waiver, states recruited and retained high-skilled international medical graduates to work in rural and underserved areas. The regional waiver initiative Crescent Care Collaborative began in November 2022 to address a shortage of healthcare professionals. In two years, it sponsored 185 physicians in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia.²⁵¹

E. State Offices of New Americans

A critical contributor to this bipartisan momentum has been the proliferation of state Offices of New Americans (ONA) and affiliated offices and positions. State membership in the national ONA network has more than tripled since 2019.²⁵² ONAs serve as coordination hubs across agencies and stakeholders, supporting immigrant integration in the workforce and local communities, developing cross-sector partnerships, and informing economic strategies.

A number of ONAs established since 2020, including those in Colorado, Maine, Minnesota, North Dakota, and Utah, operate within economic development-related agencies or governors' offices.²⁵³ Colorado's ONA worked with state legislators to create the country's first virtual, career-aligned English-language program and spearheaded efforts to develop legislation supporting the reentry of international medical graduates.²⁵⁴ Similar offices in Utah and North Dakota assisted employers in attracting and retaining global talent and connected them with immigrant talent in the United States.²⁵⁵ Utah partnered with the Utah Advanced Materials Manufacturing Institute to pilot a manufacturing training program as part of the state's "Return to Work" initiative.²⁵⁶ Maine's ONA focused on workforce and economic development, with a Business Leadership Forum as an expert resource.²⁵⁷

ONAs have been instrumental in supporting internationally trained professionals and advancing economic inclusion across agencies. Nevada's ONA convened the multisector Immigrant Workforce Development

249 ND Bismarck, "[A Workforce Center Partner Agency Update](#)," Schramm, "[Workforce Programs Recruit](#)"; ND Department of Commerce, "[North Dakota Workforce Development Council](#)."

250 North Carolina Global Talent Office, "[Global Talent Office Grant Program](#)."

251 Jennifer Clyburn Reed, "[Testimony](#)," written testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, hearing "America's Regional Commissions: Sharing Best Practices in Regional and Economic Development," Sept. 18, 2024; Southeast Crescent Regional Commission, [Southeast Crescent Regional Commission Annual Report 2024](#) (2024).

252 American Immigration Council, [End of Year Report 2024](#) (Dec. 2024).

253 Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, "[Office of New Americans](#)"; State of Maine Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future, "[Maine Office of New Americans](#)"; Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, "[Office of New Americans](#)"; North Dakota Department of Commerce, "[Global Talent Office](#)"; Governor's Office of Economic Opportunity, "[Utah Center for Immigration and Integration](#)." Accessed July 2, 2025.

254 World Education Services, "[Colorado's Office of New Americans Is Elevating Immigrant Inclusion in State Government](#)," Oct. 31, 2024; Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, Office of New Americans, "[Virtual, Career-Aligned English as a Second Language Program](#)," 2024.

255 Utah Center for Immigration and Integration, "[State of Oklahoma UCII Presentation](#)," Aug. 2024; North Dakota Department of Commerce, "[Global Talent Office](#)"; Chris Schilken, "[Testimony in Support of Senate Bill No. 2018](#)," written testimony before the House Appropriations: Education and Environment Committee, North Dakota Legislative Branch, January 15, 2025.

256 Jay, "[Closing the Skilled Workforce Gap](#)"; Utah System of Higher Education, "[Return to Work](#)," Aug. 20, 2024; Joseph, "[Episode 93](#)."

257 State of Maine Governor's Office, "[Maine Office of New Americans](#)."

Group and produced a career pathways guide for internationally trained nurses.²⁵⁸ The Office of Global Michigan collaborated with the state's Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs to create and update licensing guides for key sectors.²⁵⁹ New York's office funded the Professional Pathways for High-Skilled Immigrants Program, delivered through a network of nonprofit partners.²⁶⁰ The Michigan and Illinois ONAs were charged with coordinating meaningful language access to state services.²⁶¹ Offices in Virginia, Minnesota, and Maine advanced entrepreneurship supports.²⁶² Although Oklahoma's State Work Permits and Visas Task Force recommended the state create an Office of New Oklahomans, it is yet to move ahead.²⁶³

As states align education and workforce systems and develop economic development strategies, ONAs are critical contributors. Their role in institutionalizing immigrant inclusion ensures continuity, strategic planning, and scalable impact across state systems.

F. Improving language access

States' language access laws have provided immigrants and other English language learners with greater access to government information and services across various agencies as well as in K-12 schools and the workplace. They also reflect states' obligations under federal civil rights laws and regulations in place at the time.

Several states, including New Jersey, New York, Hawaii, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, Maryland, and Washington, have taken steps to extend language access across state agencies, at local government levels, and across school systems.²⁶⁴ Illinois established an Immigrant Impact Task Force, which included examining language access gaps in state agencies.²⁶⁵ Hawaii's new Immigrant Services and Access Unit advanced language access.²⁶⁶ North Carolina's Department of Information Technology adopted a Language Access Plan to ensure meaningful participation in its programs, activities, and services.²⁶⁷ Utah and Washington addressed language access in schools and family participation in children's education.²⁶⁸ Oregon increased the opportunity for K-12 multilingual education.²⁶⁹ Minnesota established the Task Force on English Learner Programs to advance learning opportunities in public schools.²⁷⁰

258 State of Nevada, "[Governor's Office for New Americans](#)," World Education Services, "[Nevada: From State Office to Statewide Action with SIIP](#)," July 31, 2024; Governor's Office for New Americans and World Education Services, "[Nevada Licensing Guide for Internationally Trained Professionals](#)," 2021. Accessed June 30, 2025.

259 Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs, "[An Online Resource for Skilled Immigrants](#)."

260 Governor Kathy Hochul, "[Governor Hochul Announces Expansion of Statewide Program to Help High-Skilled Immigrants Find Jobs](#)," Feb. 17, 2023; Professionals Pathways Program, "[Professional Pathways Program](#)."

261 [H.B. 4720](#), 102d Leg., Reg. Sess. (Mich. 2023); [S.B. 3762](#), 103d Gen. Assemb., 2023-24 Reg. Sess. (Ill. 2024).

262 Commonwealth of Virginia Office of Governor, "[New Americans Are Valuable Contributors to the Commonwealth and Are Worth Competing For: Annual Report 2022-2023](#)," Oct. 12th, 2023; Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, "[Office of New Americans](#)"; State of Maine Governor's Office, "[Maine Office of New Americans](#)."

263 Oklahoma State Work Permits and Visas Task Force, "[Final Report](#)" (2024).

264 [S. 2459](#), 220th Leg., 2022-23 Reg. Sess. (N.J. 2022); [N.Y. Exec. Law § 202-a](#) (2025); New York Office of General Services, "New York State Language Access Law." Accessed June 30, 2025; [H.B. 2017](#), 32d Leg., 2024 Reg. Sess. (Haw. 2024); [S.B. 2782](#), 32d Leg., 2024 Reg. Sess. (Haw. 2024); State of Illinois Office of the Governor, "[Gov. Pritzker Signs Language Equity and Access Act](#)," Aug. 2, 2024; [S.B. 382](#), 102d Leg., Reg. Sess. (Mich. 2023); American Immigration Council Staff, "[What is Tim Walz's Record on Immigration?](#)," Oct. 2, 2024; [S.B. 318](#), 81st Leg., 2021 Reg. Sess. (Nev. 2021); [H.B. 1082](#), ch. 679, 2022 Reg. Sess. (Md. 2022); [Engrossed Substitute S.B. 5693](#), 67th Leg., 2022 Reg. Sess. (Wash. 2022); [A.B. 266](#), 82d Leg., 2023 Reg. Sess. (Nev. 2023).

265 20 ILCS 5156/5 (Illinois Immigrant Impact Task Force Act).

266 [S.B. 2787](#), 32d Leg., 2024 Reg. Sess. (Haw. 2024).

267 North Carolina Department of Information Technology, "[Language Access Plan](#)" (Dec. 2024).

268 [H.B. 302](#), 2022 Gen. Sess. (Utah 2022); [H.B. 1153](#), 2021-22 Leg., Reg. Sess. (Wash. 2022).

269 [H.B. 2056](#), 81st Legis. Assemb., 2021 Reg. Sess. (Or. 2021).

270 [H.F. 5237](#), 93d Leg., 2023-24 Reg. Sess. (Minn. 2024).

Improving language access has expanded workforce opportunities. Illinois has required reasonable accommodations for applicants whose second language is English for certain licensing exams, while Colorado required bilingual childcare licensing resources and established a bilingual licensing unit in the Department of Early Childhood.²⁷¹ State and local language access policies will remain critical as federal language access efforts evolve.

G. Entrepreneurship and business support

Recognizing the outsized role of immigrant entrepreneurs in job creation, some states have integrated immigrant business ownership and self-employment into their economic and workforce development efforts to promote homegrown solutions. While some programs directly serve immigrant entrepreneurs, states have also incorporated immigrants into broader programs for underserved communities, where addressing immigrant entrepreneurs' barriers to accessing financial and business support has proved critical to their success.

State grants and loans have enabled innovative and job-creating entrepreneurship. California's SEED initiative is a prime example of state-led funding for immigrant-owned businesses that have helped build credit and fuel success.²⁷² Minnesota designed the Community Wealth Building Program for immigrant and other underserved communities for similar effect; its Emerging Entrepreneur Loan Program has served immigrants as part of larger community profiles.²⁷³ Washington's Small Business Flex Fund and Colorado's Startup Loan Fund have reached immigrant entrepreneurs as part of their work assisting underserved communities through a network of culturally competent and mission-based lenders.²⁷⁴

Community navigators and technical assistance delivered through culturally competent partners have been central. Programs in Minnesota, Colorado, Illinois, Washington, and Oregon have provided outreach and support, including through immigrant-serving organizations.²⁷⁵ New York's Immigrant Entrepreneur Center connected users to comprehensive services.²⁷⁶ The Greater Portland Immigrant Welcome Center partnered with the Indus Fund, a microloan fund serving first-generation immigrants, to encourage small businesses leadership; the fund in turn partnered with Maine's Department of Economic and Community Development to offer mentorship for loan recipients to help improve outcomes.²⁷⁷

States, joined by workforce providers and community anchors, have cultivated immigrant entrepreneurs. Global Entrepreneur in Residence programs have retained immigrant entrepreneurs through H-1B university sponsorship. The International Institute of Minnesota launched a New American Entrepreneurship Program as part of its Business Career Pathway initiative; public libraries in Ohio and South Carolina have offered training leading to an industry-recognized, stackable, transferable certificate; and the College of

271 [H.B. 5457](#), 103d Gen. Assemb., 2023–24 Reg. Sess. (Ill. 2025); [H.B. 24-1009](#), 75th Gen. Assemb., 2024 Reg. Sess. (Colo. 2024).

272 California Grant Portal, "[Social Entrepreneurs for Economic Development 2.5 Grant](#)."

273 S.F. 1696, 93d Leg., 2023 Reg. Sess. (Minn. 2023); Maine Employment and Economic Development, "[Emerging Entrepreneur Loan Program](#)."

274 Small Business Flex Fund, "[Washington Small Business Flex Fund 2](#)"; Washington State Department of Commerce, "[As businesses look to COVID-19 reopening and recovery, Commerce announces new public-private Flex Fund loan program for Washington small businesses and nonprofits](#)," June 30, 2021; Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade, "[Colorado Startup Loan Fund](#)."

275 [Ch. 53 \(S.F. 3035\)](#), 2023 Minn. Laws (Reg. Sess.) (Minn. 2023); Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, "[Small Business Assistance Partnerships](#)"; State of Colorado Office of the Governor, "[Improving Access to Small Business Funding: OEDIT Announces Partner Outreach Program](#)," Oct. 8, 2024; State of Illinois Office of the Governor, "[State of Illinois Joins Community Navigators to Urge Applying for Big Grants](#)," Nov. 6, 2020; Washington State Department of Commerce, "[Small Business Resiliency Network](#)," Jan. 2021; Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs, "[Technical Assistance for Underrepresented Businesses Program](#)."

276 New York State, Empire State Development, "Immigrant Entrepreneurs: Get the Help Your Business Needs to Succeed in New York State."

277 Greater Portland Immigrant Welcome Center, "[Business Hub](#)"; The Indus Fund, "[What Is the Mentorship Program?](#)"

Western Idaho piloted a digital skills pathway to entrepreneurship.²⁷⁸ A Lincoln, Nebraska, nonprofit, recognized for its promising practice by the U.S. Department of Labor, innovated entrepreneurship training for immigrant female business owners.²⁷⁹

H. Pathways to higher education

To build long-term workforce capacity, states have increased immigrants' access to postsecondary education by creating pathways to qualify for in-state tuition and state-based financial aid.²⁸⁰

Since 2020, Arizona, Massachusetts, Nevada, and Virginia have expanded eligibility for in-state tuition and state-based financial aid to qualifying students regardless of immigration status.²⁸¹ Arkansas expanded eligibility for in-state tuition to individuals with employment authorization and to DACA recipients.²⁸² Vermont granted all residents, regardless of immigration status, access to in-state tuition and state need-based financial aid.²⁸³

States also opened up pathways to humanitarian entrants and to immigrants in the U.S. seeking asylum and to those with temporary status. Utah and Oregon granted refugees, Special Immigrant Visa holders, humanitarian parolees, asylees, asylum seekers, and Temporary Protected Status holders access to in-state tuition. Oregon also gave these groups access to state financial aid.²⁸⁴ Nevada extended in-state tuition to refugees, asylees, and Temporary Protected Status holders who established state residency. Asylum seekers and asylees who established residency in Maine were made eligible for in-state tuition.²⁸⁵ Maine has also provided refugees residency status for tuition purposes upon direct arrival in the state, offering immediate access to in-state tuition; Virginia has also included Special Immigrant Visa holders.²⁸⁶

Community and technical colleges remain a central vehicle for immigrant education and upskilling. Refugees, humanitarian parolees, and Afghan Special Immigrant Visa holders who settled in Vermont upon arrival were considered residents for tuition purposes in the Vermont State Colleges system.²⁸⁷ California made in-state tuition available to recently arrived immigrants, refugees, and asylees for credit-bearing ESL

278 International Institute of Minnesota, "[Entrepreneurship Class](#)"; American Institutes for Research, "[Cuyahoga County Public Library Entrepreneurship IET Program](#)" and "[Greenville Lifelong Learning Entrepreneurship Program](#)," IET Strategies in Action Series: Promising Practices for Regionally Responsive Integrated Education and Training Programs, Sept. 2024; Idaho Workforce Development Council, [Idaho WIOA Combined State Plan, PYS 2024-2027](#) (210, 215).

279 City of Lincoln, "[Workforce Development Grants - \\$12M Total](#)"; American Job Center Lancaster and Saunders Counties, "[Sector Strategies](#)."

280 States created pathways to a range of higher educational institutions, including public colleges, universities, community colleges, and technical colleges. Pathways do not necessarily include all higher educational institutions, and pathways vary in eligibility criteria for accessing in-state tuition and state-based financial aid.

281 [S.C.R. 1044](#), 55th Leg., 1st Reg. Sess. (Ariz. 2021); Massachusetts Department of Higher Education, "[Board of Higher Education \(BHE\) Implementation Procedures and Affidavit: Tuition Equity for Massachusetts High School Completers](#)"; [S.B. 347](#), 81st Leg., 2021 Reg. Sess. (Nev. 2021); [Va. Code § 23.1-505.1](#) (2025). Accessed June 30, 2025. States require in-state high-school attendance for a certain length of time and graduation (or equivalency); some pathways exclude certain temporary visa categories.

282 [Ark. Code Ann. § 6-60-215](#) (2024).

283 [S. 191](#), 2023–24 Sess. (Vt. 2024) ([Act No. 136](#)). S. 191 covers refugees, humanitarian parolees, and Afghan Special Immigrant Visa holders, who are deemed residents for tuition purposes under [Act 166](#), 2021–22 Sess. (Vt. 2022) under qualifying conditions.

284 [H.B. 102](#), 2023 Gen. Sess. (Utah 2023); [S.B. 1522](#), 81st Legis. Assemb., 2022 Reg. Sess. (Or. 2022); [S.B. 272](#), 82d Legis. Assemb., 2023 Reg. Sess. (Or. 2023); [H.B. 2586](#), 83d Legis. Assemb., 2025 Reg. Sess. (Or. 2025).

285 Nevada System of Higher Education Board of Regents, "[Regulations for Determining Residency and Tuition Charges](#)," Title 4; University of Maine System, "[Administrative Practice Letter IV-G](#)." Accessed June 30, 2025.

286 [H.B. 1179](#), 2020 Reg. Sess. (Va. 2020); University of Maine System, "[Administrative Practice Letter IV-G](#)"; Minn. Stat. § 136A.101 (2024).

287 [Act 166](#), 2021–22 Sess. (Vt. 2022). The Vermont State Colleges System Board of Trustees extended Act 166, which provided access to the Community College of Vermont, to all its institutions. Vermont State Colleges System, "[VERMONT STATE COLLEGES BOARD OF TRUSTEES EXPANDS IN-STATE TUITION TO REFUGEES AT ALL VSCS INSTITUTIONS](#)," Sept. 14, 2022.

classes.²⁸⁸ Washington simplified the pathway for students, regardless of immigration status, to qualify for in-state tuition and state aid at community and technical colleges.²⁸⁹ Colorado's tuition-free workforce development and healthcare worker initiatives – and the Colorado Promise Program – were made available to qualifying immigrants.²⁹⁰

State Promise programs, wraparound supports, and credential recognition are emerging as best practices to ensure immigrant students not only enroll but also succeed.²⁹¹ Promise programs are intended to help state residents complete postsecondary degree programs; they generally close the financial gap after other aid has been applied, although funding can be offered at the outset. Offices of New Americans and community and technical colleges are key partners in aligning access to training and higher education with workforce system goals.

V. Playbook of actionable recommendations

Across the country, a dynamic economic landscape created opportunities to broaden labor market participation and enhance economic development. In response, states have been modernizing their workforce systems and building adaptive talent pipelines that meet both today's job demands and tomorrow's workforce needs.

For more than 15 years, states have quietly led the way in recognizing and leveraging the contributions of immigrants as workers, entrepreneurs, and community members. In partnership with business leaders, civil society, and local governments, state policymakers have developed practical strategies to ensure that immigrants are recognized as integral to economic competitiveness and shared prosperity.

A scan of state policy actions from 2020–2024 reveals sustained and expanding momentum. More states have deliberately integrated immigrant talent into their workforce and economic development strategies and enhanced pathways to opportunity. As states have focused on increasing the participation of populations historically facing barriers, they were primed to tap underutilized immigrant talent – already proven, vital contributors to their workforces, economies, and communities.

Several themes emerged from this review of state policy action. A whole-of-government approach, for instance, has led to innovation, efficiency, and effectiveness. States' legislative and agency studies have recognized immigrant contributions to the workforce, identified policy solutions, and supported state action. Workforce plans and economic strategies have raised the visibility of immigrant workers as a significant segment of the labor force and channeled new resources to their participation. The growth of Offices of New Americans has institutionalized immigrant inclusion and fostered cross-agency coordination, boosting efforts to integrate immigrants into workforce and economic strategies and lower barriers to their participation. Cross-sector support has been essential to amplifying these efforts.

Another theme that emerged was a consistent throughline across states in leveraging the underutilized skills of foreign-trained immigrants. A pipeline of workforce development efforts, such as

288 [A.B. 1232](#), 2021–22 Leg., Reg. Sess. (Cal. 2021). In 2017, California provided in-state tuition at community colleges to refugees and Special Immigrant Visa holders who settled in the state. [A.B. 343](#), 2017–18 Leg., Reg. Sess. (Cal. 2017).

289 Engrossed Second Substitute S.B. 5194, 67th Leg., 2021 Reg. Sess. (Wash. 2021).

290 [H.B. 24-1340](#), 74th Gen. Assemb., 2024 Reg. Sess. (Colo. 2024); Colorado Community College System, "[Colorado Community College System Launches Free Training for In-Demand Jobs](#)"; [H.B. 22-1155](#), 73d Gen. Assemb., 2022 Reg. Sess. (Colo. 2022); University of Colorado Denver, "[Colorado Promise](#)"; Colorado Department of Higher Education, "[Revised ASSET Legislation Fact Sheet](#)."

291 M. Kate Callahan et al., [Affordability, Access, and Success: A Framework for Examining Statewide College Promise Programs](#) (Research for Action, Nov. 2019). [H.B. 2835](#), 81st Legis. Assemb., 2021 Reg. Sess. (Or. 2021); see National Skills Coalition, "[Bill Creates Funding](#)." [S.B. 2690](#), 103d Gen. Assemb., 2023–24 Reg. Sess. (Ill. 2024).

taskforce studies, legislative and agency actions, the formation of ONAs, job center services, training programs, and career and support services, has focused on developing and deploying this talent.

However, workforce efforts have also led to more meaningful inclusion of immigrants of all skills, education levels, and language backgrounds, expanding on previous efforts limited in many states to highly skilled immigrants. Workplace learning has been instrumental in creating opportunities for language instruction and upskilling for frontline workers and employees with less formal education and lower levels of English proficiency. Aligning employers' needs and employees' potential has helped states develop more resilient workforces. The growth of bi- and multilingual workforce instruction has reflected both the composition of the labor pool and community needs for culturally competent services. Public libraries, community colleges, and local nonprofits have served as community anchors, expanding access to connectivity, devices, and foundational digital literacy skills.

Emerging best practices in this area reflect a broader set of trends: reducing barriers to employment and skills recognition, expanding access to training through virtual and hybrid learning for English language learners and working adults, and building work-based and skills-based learning pipelines to promote employer adoption of skills-first hiring practices. Collectively, these efforts have focused on making workforce systems more responsive and labor markets more efficient, while positioning immigrants as a pillar of state talent agendas.

Still, significant gaps continue to impede productivity and potential. Credentialing and licensure processes remain fragmented and costly, limiting the ability of internationally trained professionals to fulfill their potential. English proficiency is a foundational job skill, but current instructional capacity falls far short of demand. Immigrants are underrepresented in apprenticeships and “earn and learn” models, and access to short-term training programs with transferrable, stackable, industry-recognized credentials — a critical vehicle for immigrant economic mobility — remains limited. Coordination with community and technical colleges — engines of workforce preparation — is essential to ensure training aligns with evolving labor market needs. Increased digital skills training and access to devices and broadband internet are foundational investments for sustaining and continuously developing a high-performing workforce and dynamic economy.

Moreover, persistent access barriers to transportation, childcare, housing, and digital skills and tools continue to sideline willing and able workers. Job readiness services are inadequate for many skilled immigrants navigating unfamiliar labor markets. More outreach, navigators, and structural supports are essential to strengthen service delivery and expand participation in workforce programs. At the same time, workforce data systems need to be modernized to improve service delivery, funding efficiency, and outcome monitoring.

The result of these overlapping barriers is a labor market that becomes economically self-defeating, leaving too many people on the sidelines.

This playbook offers actionable recommendations for states to build on progress in lowering barriers and increasing opportunity. While comprehensive in covering workforce issues, it does not cover related but critical areas such as higher education affordability, immigrant entrepreneurship, and global talent recruitment, or structural barriers such as housing, childcare, and transportation. These are vital complements and should be addressed in coordination with expert partners.

States and workforce actors can most successfully leverage the talent of this segment of the labor force by reducing barriers to participation, mainstreaming access to workforce development, and improving workforce policy and practice overall, benefiting all job seekers navigating a rapidly changing labor market.

Together, these efforts chart a practical path for long-term economic strength and shared opportunity.

Whole-of-government coordination

Effective workforce integration begins with intentional coordination across state and local agencies. As states streamline workforce governance and align education and workforce systems, immigrant residents should be incorporated alongside other state populations in planning. To promote efficient and productive planning, states should:

- establish Offices of New Americans within governors' offices or departments aligned with economic development and empower them with the authority and resources to lead interagency initiatives
- include representatives from Offices of New Americans in key state offices, cross-agency initiatives, and taskforces related to workforce, education, and economic development, ensuring that immigrant expertise is represented in core policy discussions
- establish bipartisan task forces focused specifically on immigrant workforce integration, leveraging cross-sector stakeholder insights to generate evidence-based, broadly supported policy recommendations
- coordinate with municipal governments to support cities and localities that serve as the front lines for labor demand, community reception, and immigrant inclusion

Reducing regulatory and bureaucratic hurdles

For many skilled workers, entry into the workforce is blocked not by ability but by licensing red tape and burdensome credential assessments. This group includes internationally trained professionals who are prevented from using their training because of where they obtained their credentials and relevant experience. To unlock and benefit from skilled immigrants' economic potential, states should:

- accelerate occupational licensure reform and ensure that interstate compacts and universal recognition agreements recognize alternative pathways into the professions
- work with licensing boards and credentialing bodies to standardize licensure and credential recognition processes
- streamline licensing processes by eliminating unnecessary barriers such as redundant training, duplicative language proficiency assessments, and requirements tied to immigration status
- support licensing authorities with specialized staff, technical assistance, and public-facing pathway guides
- fund navigators and nonprofit partners who help immigrants navigate licensing and credentialing processes and provide career coaching services
- align licensure and credential reform with workforce planning to maximize skills utilization and economic productivity

Expanding adult education and workforce development

A strong workforce system must provide flexible, accessible, and industry-aligned training that addresses workers' education and skills. Expanding and improving English language learning and work-based training and career pathways are critical to expand immigrant participation in the labor force. To accelerate workforce readiness, states should:

- increase funding for adult education and workforce programs overall, focusing on virtual platforms, digital tools, and hybrid formats to scale participation and support caregivers, working adults, and

individuals with transportation challenges and living in rural communities

- expand integrated, contextualized ESL workforce trainings (IET/IELCE), and design training program models to facilitate the workforce participation and career advancement of internationally trained professionals, especially in high-demand sectors
- improve access to apprenticeships, preapprenticeships, and other “earn as you learn” opportunities by:
 - » collaborating with industry groups and employers, community and technical colleges, and workforce boards
 - » incentivizing businesses to provide more work-and-learn opportunities
 - » developing intermediaries such as community and technical colleges
 - » placing technical assistance in relevant agencies.
- expand short-term training programs with portable, stackable, industry-recognized credentials, fostering responsive career pathways and ongoing learning opportunities
- design sector-based training programs with immigrants in mind, including the use of workforce intermediaries that help connect underrepresented communities to sector partnerships.

Improving digital access and literacy

Digital fluency is now a prerequisite for participating in the labor market, and AI competencies are equally critical. Equitable access to digital tools, broadband, and AI and digital literacy skills training is essential for creating resilient workforces. To future-proof their workforces, states should:

- invest in broadband infrastructure and digital device access, particularly in underserved and rural areas, to enhance connectivity and support digital inclusion
- improve access to online applications to programs, services, and devices by providing multilingual materials and alternate application options for people without digital access
- embed contextualized digital and AI literacy into existing adult education and workforce programs, and ensure access for English language learners
- design digital and AI skills training for a range of language proficiencies, literacy levels, and formal education
- design language instruction and workforce training programs that are mobile-friendly, but emphasize the importance of teaching and learning digital skills suited to the desktop and laptop devices generally used in the workplace
- monitor and mitigate potential biases in AI-driven educational and employment tools to ensure equitable outcomes
- design AI tools with immigrant users in mind, setting baseline functionality and intended outcomes (including safeguards against biases), such as the ability to reliably evaluate international and non-traditional experiences in educational and job screenings
- establish clear rules for the collection, storage, and use of personally identifiable information in workforce, adult education, and related data systems, digital tools, and AI-enabled platforms

Enhancing workforce services

Beyond skills and credentials, all workers — including immigrants — need comprehensive support systems to succeed. To support robust and resilient labor market participation, states should:

- expand the use of navigators and case managers, including multilingual and digital navigators, within workforce centers and training programs
- provide essential wraparound services, such as childcare, transportation, and skill and credential

recognition, to support successful workforce program participation and transition into the labor market

- support nonprofits organizations that provide job readiness and career pathways services
- strengthen partnerships with nonprofit organizations and community intermediaries to expand the reach of American Job Center services to immigrant communities and ensure that services are culturally responsive and accessible through trusted messengers

Creating pathways to community and technical colleges

Community and technical colleges play a central role in workforce training and must be fully integrated into immigrant inclusion strategies. They facilitate immigrant entry into the labor force, support internationally trained professionals in filling training gaps for licensing requirements, and power career mobility. States should:

- ensure eligibility for in-state tuition and state financial aid for immigrant residents who meet state criteria
- fund credential recognition, transcript translation, and equivalency documentation as well as wrap-around services such as navigators, language support, and family care needs
- provide professional development for high school and postsecondary counselors and financial aid officers to equip them to advise immigrant students on postsecondary pathways, financial aid options, and other supports
- align education and workforce systems, with the participation of state and local entities focused on immigrant inclusion and workforce-affiliated entities, to support job mobility

Building strong public-private partnerships

The success of immigrant workforce strategies depends on robust cross-sector collaborations with the private sector and civil society. Program design should reflect immigrant talent in the local economy and minimize barriers to participation. States should:

- partner with community intermediaries, industry associations and employers, labor groups, community and technical colleges, and workforce boards to codesign workforce programs that reflect immigrant talent in local labor forces and address real-time industry demand
- incentivize and support employer-based solutions, including apprenticeships and “earn and learn” programs and workplace instruction, to develop immigrant talent pipelines and job mobility
- invest in sector partnerships and provide technical assistance to align training with industry-needed skills to ensure an inclusive program design that reaches immigrant workers and addresses systemic barriers to employment

Innovating funding strategies

Scaling effective workforce strategies and immigrant economic inclusion requires creative, blended financing. States should:

- use braided and blended federal, state, private, and philanthropic funding to increase the reach and impact of workforce programs, drawing on sources such as WIOA funding including the discretionary Governor’s Reserve funds, Perkins Career and Technical Education funding, SNAP E&T, TANF, ORR, Community Development Block Grants, and OCTAE-authorized use of funds
- strategically apply federal infrastructure and broadband investments to support immigrant work-

- force integration and strengthen statewide workforce training systems
- employ flexible state funds to fill gaps left by federally restricted expenditures, ensuring coverage for critical support services such as credential evaluations, transportation, and childcare

Strengthening data collection and use

Data is the backbone of effective program design and accountability. Effective data collection on immigrant worker participants can identify successful policies and programs to replicate and scale. States should:

- improve data collection and performance monitoring to support responsive, evidence-based, continuous program improvement
- disaggregate workforce and education data to capture immigrant participation, barriers, and outcomes
- enhance interoperability across data systems to enable real-time coordination and cross-agency alignment, reduce duplication in services and programs, and provide effective referrals
- invest in longitudinal and qualitative research to track long-term program outcomes, assess impact, and identify areas for improvement for immigrant participants
- establish clear rules for the collection, storage, and use of personally identifiable information in workforce, adult education, and related data systems, digital tools, and AI-enabled platforms

From front door to work floor: Workforce access for internationally trained professionals

An ecosystem of states and localities, adult education and training providers, nonprofits, community organizations, community colleges, and businesses acted at multiple points of the talent pipeline to increase ITPs' access to the workforce system, optimize their skills and experiences, and enhance opportunities for them to use their training, skills, and experiences productively.



TASK FORCES

Colorado's ONA convened a Global Talent Task Force that issued a road map for reducing barriers and increasing support for ITPs, as did Michigan's Task Force on Foreign Trained Medical Professional Licensing.²⁹²

LICENSING AND CREDENTIALING

Utah authorized state agencies to issue licenses or certifications to internationally trained professionals whose qualifications and experiences were substantially equivalent to state standards.²⁹³

WORKFORCE PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

The Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) system of the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) developed a train-the-trainers curriculum on best practices on case management, understanding credentials, and tackling barriers that ITPs face, and worked with trainers across the state.²⁹⁴ It also partnered with community organizations and employers and used comprehensive assessments at the local provider level to identify ITPs for workforce development.²⁹⁵

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Austin Community College offered career pathway classes for ITPs, which also provided one-on-one support and university transcript translations.²⁹⁶

292 [S.B. 22-140](#) (Colo. 2022); Office of New Americans, "Global Talent Task Force"; Global Talent Task Force, [Global Talent Task Force Final Report](#); Michigan Task Force, [Foreign Trained Medical Professional Licensing](#).

293 [S.B. 43](#), 2022 Gen. Sess. (Utah 2022); [S.B. 35](#), 2023 Gen. Sess. (Utah 2023); [H.B. 58](#), 2024 Gen. Sess. (Utah 2024).

294 Texas Workforce Commission, [TEXAS WIOA COMBINED PLAN, PYS 2024-2027](#).

295 TWC, [WIOA COMBINED PLAN](#).

296 Austin Community College District, ["Internationally Trained Professionals."](#)



WORKFORCE SERVICES

North Dakota and Michigan, working with Global Detroit, provided services through American Job Centers.²⁹⁷



FUNDING

Michigan, Ohio, and Texas affirmatively authorized providers to pay for credential evaluations as part of training programs.²⁹⁸



CAREER SERVICES

Maine's New Mainers Resource Center offered a range of free career pathways services for ITPs and a roadmap on supporting internationally trained healthcare professionals.²⁹⁹ Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Columbus, Ohio, collaborated with chambers of commerce and local nonprofits on tools to connect businesses with internationally trained professionals.³⁰⁰



CAPACITY BUILDING

TWC AEL and adult education providers in Texas developed a community of practice, supported by World Education Services' Strengthening Immigrant Inclusion Program, that led to the creation of Synergy Texas, a network committed to advancing economic opportunity for ITPs.³⁰¹

297 Michigan Works Association, "[Are you a college-educated immigrant or refugee looking to advance in Michigan?](#)"; Michigan Global Talent Initiative, "[Michigan Global Talent Initiative](#)"; Austin Community College District, [Narrative Report for Texas 2023](#); North Dakota Fargo Workforce Center, "[New American Enrollment Program](#)," Business Services, Job Service-Fargo Quarterly Newsletter, June 2024; North Dakota Department of Commerce, [North Dakota Workforce Development](#).

298 Scott Stump, "Allowable Use of Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Funds for Integrated Education and Training Programs – Frequently Asked Questions" (official memorandum, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, Aug. 15, 2019). Michigan Department of Labor & Economic Opportunity, "[Allowable Cost Policy](#)," Talent Development Division Adult Education, July 1, 2025; Ohio Aspire, "[Ohio Aspire SFY26 Integrated Education and Training Policy July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026](#)"; Courtney Arbour, "[Implementing Programs, Activities, and Services for English Language Learners - Update](#)," Texas Workforce Commission, July 21, 2021.

299 NMRC Maine, "[Welcome to The New Mainers Resource Center](#)."

300 City of Tulsa, New Tulsans Initiative, "[Flourish Tulsa Hiring Guide for Internationally Trained Professionals](#)," 2022; Columbus Chamber of Commerce, "[An Employee Guide to Hiring Global Talent in Central Ohio](#)."

301 Sara McElmurry and Trevor Shealy, "[Texas: Catalyzing Statewide Synergies with SIIP](#)," Oct. 30, 2024; Synergy, "[What Is Synergy Texas?](#)" In early 2025, the Skilled Immigrant Integration Program became the Strengthening Immigrant Inclusion Program. Trevor Shealy, "[SIIP's New Name, Same Mission: Building Inclusive Communities Together](#)," Feb. 5, 2025.

VI. Conclusion: A vision for the future

From 2020–2024, across the nation, states took bold, forward-looking steps to empower communities and position their economies for success in a rapidly evolving landscape. Policymakers adopted strategies to remove barriers to workforce participation, strengthen skill development, and expand access to education and training aligned with the demands of today's industries and tomorrow's innovations.

Immigrant workers played a vital role in these efforts. States recognized that immigrants bring essential skills, entrepreneurial drive, and global experience to local economies, making them indispensable to states' workforce-modernization and sustained-growth strategies. For more than 15 years, states have led the way in crafting policies that integrate immigrants into their workforces and economic development agendas, recognizing immigrants' vital contributions to shared prosperity.

Since 2020, bipartisan momentum has continued to grow. The accelerating demand for middle- and high-skilled talent, the widespread adoption of virtual learning platforms and other digital tools, and the mainstreaming of skills-based hiring practices have all reinforced the importance of inclusive workforce strategies. In response, states have focused on reducing licensing and credentialing barriers, expanding English-language and digital training programs, and improving access across the broader workforce development ecosystem to better leverage untapped talent in their communities.

These efforts reflect a unifying principle across the workforce system: a commitment to increasing labor market participation and expanding opportunity for workers must include employment-authorized immigrants. Whether native-born or immigrant, frontline or high-skilled, the goal is the same: ensuring that more people can access pathways to education, training, and economic mobility.

Strategies that include all workers are crucial for building national economic resilience. They enhance productivity and achieve sustainable, long-term growth. As states work to future-proof their economies, immigration is a critical lever to build resilient talent pipelines that can adapt to technological change and meet emerging demands.

By expanding participation across all communities, states are turning demographic realities into economic opportunity. By integrating immigrant talent into workforce planning, states are redefining immigration as a strategic economic asset. To harness the underutilized talent of immigrants and strengthen economic competitiveness, states must adopt a whole-of-government approach that embeds immigrant inclusion across improved systems for all workers.

The path forward requires a continued commitment to mainstreaming access to the labor market for workers facing systemic barriers. Achieving this vision demands intentional investment in on-ramps to opportunity, deeper collaboration with the business community, and closer alignment between education and workforce systems.

States are already laying the groundwork through legislative reforms, regulatory innovation, and strategic program development. The challenge — and opportunity — is to build on this momentum through coordinated, scalable strategies that ensure immigrants, along with other workers, are equipped to contribute, compete, and thrive in a continually changing economy.

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Bell's published work includes reports and briefings on refugee resettlement and community sponsorship; family detention; unaccompanied children; immigration detention and enforcement; climate displacement; and the role of technology and corporate actors in immigration enforcement. She has also contributed to numerous publications and briefings on sponsorship; forcible family separation; the U.S. asylum system; border enforcement; immigration detention; temporary protected status; climate change and displacement; and the use of mass surveillance through facial recognition technology.

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