Best Practices for Serving Skilled Immigrants and Refugees

NYS/BRIA Providers Meeting
“Skilled” Immigrants and Refugees

Who are we talking about?

➢ Immigrants/refugees/asylees with university education and/or professional experience earned abroad, seeking to work in their profession or pursue further education to qualify for a new career.
Skilled Immigrants and Refugees in New York State

- 410,000 – total foreign-educated immigrants and refugees
- 197,000 – in high-skilled jobs
- 95,000 – in semi-skilled jobs
- 93,000 – in low-skilled jobs
- 24,000 - unemployed

Source: Migration Policy Institute and Fiscal Policy Institute
Skilled Immigrants and Refugees in the New York City

- Immigrants are 47 percent of the labor force in New York City. This amounts to about 2 million.
- Approximately 26 percent of immigrants in NYC (156,000 people) with a college degree are unemployed, or working in low-skill occupations, which contribute to significant “brain waste.”

Source: Center for an Urban Future
CAMBA’s History of Supporting Immigrant Workforce

➢ CAMBA serves **27,000 immigrants** annually from over 100 countries in six program areas.

➢ CAMBA’s **Workforce Development and Refugee Services Program** specializes in assisting those with special barriers to employment including **immigrant professionals**, low-wage/low-skilled workers, long-term unemployed, refugees and asylees, formerly homeless, formerly incarcerated, trauma survivors and victims of human trafficking.

➢ We have **over 30 years** of experience in providing effective job training and job placement programs.
CAMBA’s history of supporting immigrant workforce (cont’d)

➢ In 2002 CAMBA began a program to serve Refugee Professionals. In 2007 we expanded it to include all immigrant professionals: The Immigrant Professional Training Program (IPTP).

➢ In 2013 we were selected to pilot the Immigrant Bridge (iBridge) program, a mayoral initiative funded by NYC Economic Development Corporation.

➢ In 2016, CAMBA partnered with the Cooper Union, one of the nation’s oldest and most distinguished institutions of higher learning. Together, we offer The Retraining Program for Immigrant Engineers.
Immigrant Bridge: Outcomes

- 220 people served in two-year pilot
- Program included pre-employment training, one-on-one and in-group career counseling and career pathways navigation, and mock interviews
- Participants had access to low interest loans to pay for additional training or everyday expenses while looking for work
- 36% of clients are unemployed at intake
Immigrant Bridge: Outcomes (cont’d)

- 60% placed in gateway professional jobs
- Highest job placement families: architecture, engineering, computer, mathematical, office/administrative support
- Average time to place - 6 months
- Average client salary: $42,000; 10% earning $75k or above
- Highest salary reached by program participant - $115,000
What happened to participants who did not re-enter professional careers within the 2 year pilot (40% of total participants)?

35% still looking
20% decided to stay in survival jobs / not to pursue professional employment at that time
14% did not respond to program recommendations
11% lost contact with the program
10% needed additional ESL to pursue professional employment
6% went back to school
4% other reasons (child care / family circumstances)
What worked?

- English proficiency was the highest predictor of participant’s professional success.
- Participants who did not have a survival job at program entry found professional employment faster and at a greater rate.
- Higher success rates for those that have been in the U.S. for less time (under 2 years).
- Key success indicators: meeting with counselors regularly, completing mock interviews and resume preparation. Participation in a professionally facilitated mock interview or networking event increased participant’s odds of securing professional employment by about 20%.
Not all careers are “re-buildable” or transferable to your local economy – it is important to consider participant’s ability to compete in a local economy, and the availability of employment opportunities within one’s area of specialty. Example: journalists, lawyers, marketers – these professionals may need to consider other related occupations in human services, health care, or administrative services.

Practitioners need to understand labor market information to help skilled immigrants find their fit into the local economy.
Retraining Program for Immigrant Engineers

- 250 engineering and IT professionals served annually
- Program includes upskilling courses in civil, electrical, mechanical engineering, and IT (taught at the Cooper Union); courses are short, each one offering 30 hours of instruction; participants take about 4 courses on average.
- CAMBA delivers pre-employment training, mock interviews, resume preparation, referrals to employers, facilitated industry events
- 71% of participants gain professional employment within 12 months
- Average time to place – 2 months
- Average client salary: $51,000
Retraining Program for Immigrant Engineers: Lessons Learned

What works?

- Participant engagement and buy-in are critical to successful program completion, engaged job search and job placement.
- Cultivating an engaged online community should be part of the overall engagement strategy.
- Critical for CAMBA’s staff to develop expertise in STEM fields and become overnight experts.
- Relocation outside of the NYC area is sometimes the best option for professionals whose expertise doesn’t have immediate professional application in your local economy (example: oil and gas, manufacturing / industrial engineers).
Retraining Program for Immigrant Engineers: Lessons Learned (cont’d)

• Training curriculum has to be continuously shared with and vetted by employer partners or an advisory board.
• Exposure to “industry” matters: CAMBA facilitates employer visits, professional industry gatherings and expert guest presentations.
• Unexpected conclusion: traditional engineering professionals do much better than their Information Technology counterparts. In general, foreign trained IT professionals are less competitive job applicants than their US-trained peers. Immigrants with IT backgrounds need access to more extensive upskilling.
Employer Engagement

• Follow labor market information trends and know the high-growth industries and employers in your area.
• Look for partners in the public sector: the City of NY is our largest employer with almost 15% of program participants finding civil service employment.
• Employer outreach and advocacy are essential to overcoming the lack of recognition of foreign educational credentials and work experience.
• Aim to become a “business partner” who understands employer’s needs and goals.
Do no harm: Stop, Think, and Check

- Many refugees and immigrants waste years pursuing unnecessary education, obtain wrong degree evaluations, spend thousands on proprietary training schools that might not provide them with industry-accepted certifications, accumulate debt and damage credit history in the process.
New Funding Opportunities: Refugees as Dislocated Workers

• Rationale: Many foreign-trained immigrants are unable to find a job comparable to the one they held in their home country, due in large part to the difficulty of transferring their professional certifications or academic credentials. Consequently, many foreign-trained immigrants are either underemployed or unemployed in the U.S. In this case, it is the move to the U.S. system that has hindered their ability to fully realize their earning potential and has caused a dislocation from their previous line of work.
The US DOL final WIOA regulations recognize refugees as dislocated workers by stating that individual states may change their definition of dislocated workers within their WIOA state plans to include individuals whose job dislocation occurred outside the US.

WIOA Dislocated Worker programs provide participants with career services, training, job search assistance, career counseling, and supportive services like child care or transportation assistance.

Inclusion in the definition can open DOL funding to serve refugees, and skilled immigrants in particular.
Maryland amended its definition of dislocated workers in 2016 to include refugees: refugees can now self-attest the date and location of their dislocation.

In Idaho, Global Talent Idaho works with WIOA staff in determining client’s eligibility and classify refugees as dislocated workers. Refugees are assigned to a career planner to provide a statement documenting the date of dislocation and reasons for the lack of the usual documentation.

Other states that define refugees as Dislocated Workers, include: California, Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Pennsylvania.

### Federal Definition of Dislocated Workers

A dislocated worker is an individual who:

- Has been terminated or laid off, or has received a notice of termination or layoff from employment;
- Is eligible for or has exhausted unemployment insurance;
- Has demonstrated an appropriate attachment to the workforce, but is not eligible for unemployment insurance and unlikely to return to a previous industry or occupation;
- Has been terminated or laid off or received notification of termination or layoff from employment as a result of a permanent closure or substantial layoff;
- Is employed at a facility where the employer has made the general announcement that the facility will close within 180 days;
- Was self-employed (including employment as a farmer, a rancher, or a fisherman) but is unemployed as a result of general economic conditions in the community or because of a natural disaster;
- Is a displaced homemaker who is no longer supported by another family member.
Where does New York stand on this?

NY State’s has not yet adopted refugees in the definition of dislocated workers.

Your advocacy is needed!

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