PHILADELPHIA REPORT

Steps To Success:

INTEGRATING IMMIGRANT PROFESSIONALS

WES
WORLD EDUCATION SERVICES

IMPRINT
Immigrant Professional Integration

Acknowledgements

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Graphic design by Jouna Saza, World Education Services.

INTRODUCTION

The Philadelphia region[1] is home to approximately 600,000 immigrants, who make up 10% of the region's total population.[2] **Nearly 38% of adult immigrants in the region have a bachelor's or advanced degree.**[3] Yet many of these immigrants are not working in professions which make full use of their skills and experience, a phenomenon often termed "brain waste."

At the same time, key sectors in Pennsylvania's economy face projected shortages of skilled workers. For example, the state expects a shortage of 40,300 registered nurses by 2020, leaving almost a third of the state's RN positions vacant.[3] Shortages are also expected among physicians; a quarter of medical doctors in Pennsylvania are older than 60 and moving closer to retirement.[3]

Some immigrant professionals are already helping to meet these workforce needs: nearly one in four active physicians in Pennsylvania obtained their degrees from abroad.[4] Others, such as the under-employed immigrants described above, have the potential to fill labor gaps and make significant contributions to the broader economy if their talents are fully utilized.

In order to better understand the differing employment trajectories of immigrant professionals in the United States, WES and IMPRINT conducted a first-of-its-kind study analyzing the factors correlated with the economic success of college-educated** immigrants in six metropolitan areas across the U.S., including Philadelphia. *Read the full report at* **imprintproject.org/stepstosuccess**

The study revealed the vital role of social capital, English language skills, and workplace acculturation in fostering immigrant economic success. The study results also suggested the need for different approaches in serving immigrants with purely foreign higher education, versus those who obtained at least some higher education in the United States. The findings from Philadelphia were consistent with the findings from other cities in the national study. This report highlights key factors which contribute to immigrant economic success in Philadelphia and the U.S. more broadly, as well as recommendations for action.

BRAIN WASTE

The underutilization of immigrant professionals' talent, which contributes to significant U.S. economic loss.

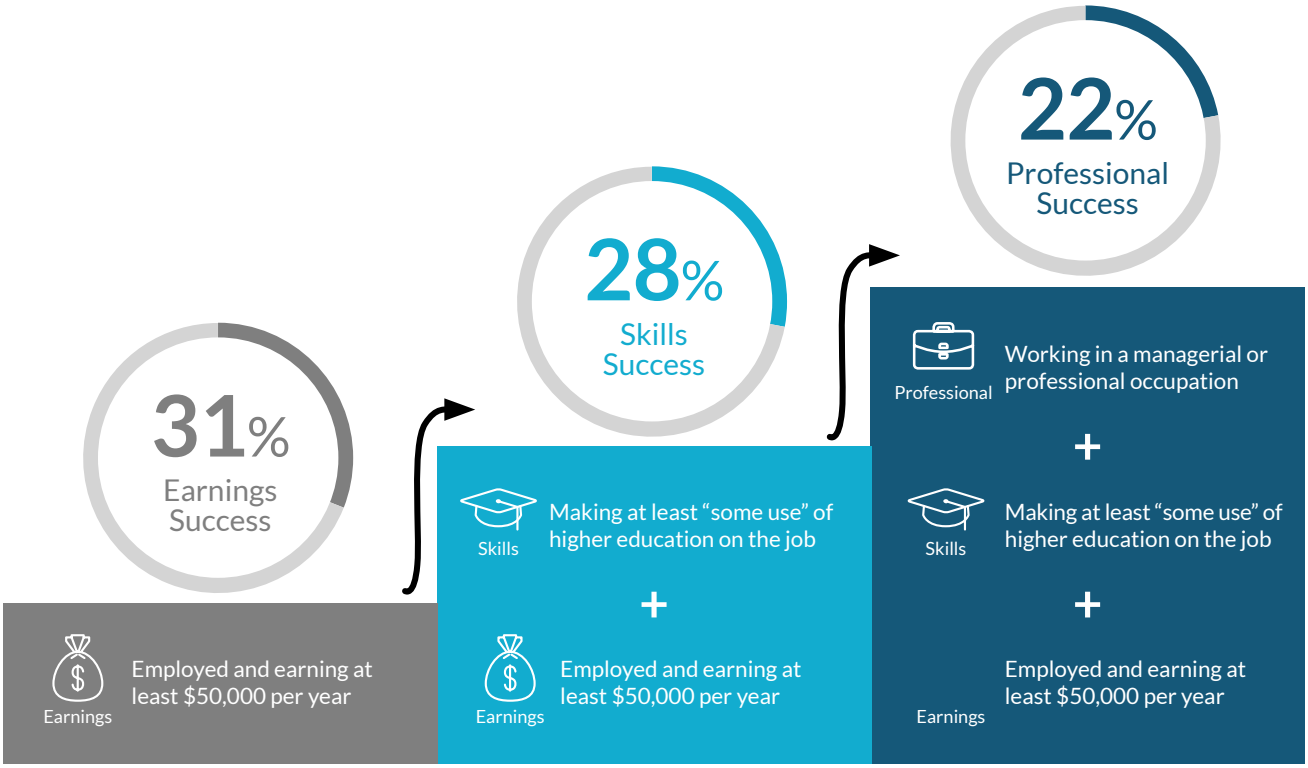
According to the Migration Policy Institute, there are approximately **7.2 million college-educated immigrants in the U.S.** An estimated **52% of these immigrants obtained their degree in a foreign country**. However, more than a quarter of these highly-skilled immigrants are either unemployed or working in jobs that do not make appropriate use of their knowledge and skills. This phenomenon, often termed "brain waste," represents a significant social and economic cost for both the individuals affected and for our society as a whole.

DEFINING SUCCESS

The study established three definitions of success and analyzed factors that correlated with the economic success and professional integration of college-educated immigrants. The definitions can be viewed as incremental levels of success, each one building upon the last.

The first definition, earnings success, refers to immigrants who were currently employed and making at least $50,000 per year. The second and third definitions focused not only on employment status and income, but also on immigrants' ability to apply their education and training on the job. Skills success refers to immigrants who were employed, making at least $50,000 ***and*** making at least "some use" of their higher education in their current job. Professional success refers

** Refers to "college-educated" immigrants, meaning those who have received any higher education outside the U.S.



Measures of success reflect increasingly-stringent analysis of the same data pool.

Figure 1. Definitions of Success

to immigrants who were employed, making at least $50,000, making at least "some use" of their higher education on the job, ***and*** employed in managerial or professional occupations.

These three definitions of success were also analyzed at a lower income threshold of $30,000.* Immigrants who met this lower requirement were categorized into *emerging* earnings, *emerging* skills, or *emerging* professional success.

* While the $30,000 income level might seem modest, it slightly exceeds the United States median per capita income of $28,000.

KEY FINDINGS

Nationwide Findings

This section presents key findings about the national sample. Across all survey respondents, approximately half (47%) had achieved the lower $30,000 income threshold of *emerging* earnings success, while a subset of those (40%) had achieved *emerging* skills success and an even smaller subset (30%) had achieved *emerging* professional success.

Defining success at the higher income threshold of $50,000, 31% of all respondents had achieved earnings success, a subset (28%) had achieved skills success, and an even smaller subset (22%) had attained professional success.

Among the factors associated with college-educated immigrants' achievement, our study found that each level of success was strongly correlated with two factors in particular: social capital* (defined as currently having many friends and family in the U.S. to rely on for support) and English language skills (based on either speaking English as a primary language or speaking English "very well").

As detailed in Table 1, strong English language skills were linked to virtually every possible measure of success in our study. Supportive networks of friends and family were also correlated with survey respondents' economic success.

Table 1 shows that respondents who reported speaking English as a primary language, or currently having many friends and family to rely on, were more likely than overall survey respondents to have achieved *emerging* earnings success. Specifically, 47% of overall survey respondents achieved *emerging* earnings success, regardless of English language ability and abundance of social capital. However, a larger percentage (55%) of respondents who spoke English as a primary language had achieved this level of success, and an even greater percentage (64%) of respondents who reported currently having many friends and family in the U.S. to rely on for support had attained *emerging* earnings success.

The findings suggest that English language skills and supportive social networks play important roles in fostering economic success for college-educated immigrants.

Finally, an even greater percentage (70%) of respondents who both spoke English as a primary language and who had abundant social capital had attained *emerging* earnings success. The same trends held true across all of the study's definitions of success.

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* Social capital is less a measurement of actual social resources exchanged between members of networks than a potential for access and ties among actors possessing more or less valuable social resources. It is this understanding that underlies the questions used in our survey to assess each individual's current social capital.

Table 1. Percentage of Success by Language and Social Capital

	$30,000 INCOME THRESHOLD			$50,000 INCOME THRESHOLD		
	EMERGING EARNINGS SUCCESS	*EMERGING* SKILLS SUCCESS	*EMERGING* PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS	EARNINGS SUCCESS	SKILLS SUCCESS	PROFESSIONAL SUCCESS
Overall Survey Respondents	**47%**	**40%**	**30%**	**31%**	**28%**	**22%**
Speak English as a Primary Language	55%	49%	39%	40%	37%	30%
Abundant Social Capital*	64%	56%	45%	44%	41%	34%
Speak English as a Primary Language and Abundant Social Capital	70%	64%	51%	51%	50%	40%

*Abundant social capital refers to respondents who reported currently having many friends/family in the U.S. to rely on for support

Philadelphia Findings

English language skills and supportive social networks were also key factors for economic success in Philadelphia. Compared to the other five cities studied, Philadelphia had the highest percentage of respondents who reported speaking English as their primary language (34%). Similarly, Philadelphia had the second highest percentage (30%) among the six cities of respondents with abundant social capital.

Additional findings indicate that a majority of respondents in Philadelphia are well equipped with English language skills and supportive social networks to achieve economic success. Specifically, 58% of Philadelphia respondents *either* spoke English as a primary language, or reported currently having many family and friends to rely on in the U.S.

As displayed in Table 2, our study also identified additional factors which had strong correlations with immigrant economic success.

In many respects, college-educated immigrants in Philadelphia have characteristics that mirror respondents in the other areas studied, with a few notable differences.

First, the majority of Philadelphia respondents (75%) have lived in the U.S. for six years or more. Our study found that living in the U.S. for at least six years is strongly correlated with higher incomes, lower rates of unemployment, higher rates of volunteering, and better English skills, as immigrants adapt culturally, linguistically, and socially to their new environment.

How Representative Are IMPRINT Respondents of Philadelphia's Immigrants Overall?

In many respects, IMPRINT respondents reflected the demographic characteristics of Philadelphia's college-educated immigrants overall. Below, we compare IMPRINT Philadelphia data to statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2012 American Community Survey (ACS) on college-educated immigrants in the Philadelphia region:

- Over two thirds (68%) of IMPRINT respondents speak English "Very Well," compared to 75% of ACS respondents.
- Three quarters (75%) of IMPRINT respondents speak a language other than English at home, compared to 74% of ACS respondents.
- A majority (75%) of IMPRINT respondents have lived in the U.S. for six years or more, compared to 83% of ACS respondents.
- A slight plurality of IMPRINT respondents in Philadelphia were European (27%), while a larger plurality of ACS respondents were Asian (48%).

Table 2. How Philadelphia Compares

KEY SUCCESS CRITERIA	PHILADELPHIA RESPONDENTS	ALL OTHER RESPONDENTS
Have Lived in the U.S Six Years or More**	75%	61%
Applied for Credential Evaluation**	73%	58%
Applied for U.S. Licensure**	21%	30%
Pursued Additional Higher Education in the U.S.**	66%	55%
Registered to Vote*	46%	38%
Currently Have "Many" Friends and Family in the U.S. to Rely on for Support*	30%	25%
Feel Like Current Training/Education is "Good Enough" to Meet Career Goals	46%	47%
Speak English "Very Well"	67%	65%
Speak English as Primary Language**	34%	24%

** p<.01, * p < .05, no asterisk denotes lack of statistical significance
^"All Other Respondents" includes respondents in the survey's other five cities as well as those who chose "other" as the place they currently lived.

Philadelphia-area respondents were 1.3 times more likely to have applied for a credential evaluation than all other respondents. Additionally, the unemployment rate* among Philadelphia respondents was significantly lower (16%) than the average in all other areas (23%). These findings suggest that college-educated immigrants in Philadelphia may be making more of an effort to get their credentials evaluated and have been more successful in obtaining employment.

Interestingly, despite pursuing credential evaluations at a higher rate, less than a quarter of respondents in Philadelphia (21%) had applied for U.S. professional licensure, compared to 30% of respondents across all other areas. Since there is limited research on the patterns of U.S. licensure, we are unable to determine the reasons for the relatively lower percentage in Philadelphia. However, differences in U.S. licensure patterns and trends present an area for future research.

Our study also found that over half (55%) of all respondents had pursued additional higher education in the United States. This trend was stronger in Philadelphia, with an even greater proportion (66%) reporting having pursued additional higher education in the U.S. Respondents in Philadelphia were 1.2 times more likely than all other respondents to pursue additional higher education in the U.S.

Obtaining additional higher education in the U.S. was found to be valuable for respondents in attaining employment and increased income compared to respondents who had exclusively foreign higher education. Numerous findings in our study highlighted U.S. employers' strong preference for American experience and training. Furthermore, according to the Migration Policy Institute, immigrants** with U.S. college degrees are three times more likely to work in high-skilled jobs than those with a foreign degree.[4] However, it is also worth noting that immigrant professionals tend to repeat unnecessary courses of study already mastered in their home countries, although our data does not reveal the extent of this investment.

* The unemployment rate was calculated as the ratio of unemployed respondents to respondents in the labor force (unemployed plus employed).

** Here "immigrants" refers to legal permanent residents.

Credential Evaluation is the process of assessing academic qualifications obtained in one country and determining their equivalents in another country.

U.S. Professional Licensure is granted through a state licensing board and often involves training and exams, but the process varies by profession and by state. For foreign-educated immigrants, credential evaluation is required to apply for licensure.

Survey respondents who reported having pursued additional U.S. education *were* more likely to be employed and successful than those who only received education abroad.

Finally, respondents in Philadelphia were civically engaged in their communities. Our study found that compared to the average across all areas, Philadelphia respondents were more likely to have volunteered in the past year for a religious organization (29% of Philadelphia-area respondents), neighborhood or civic group (27%), or ethnic association (20%).

Additionally, respondents in Philadelphia were 1.2 times more likely to be registered to vote in the U.S. than respondents across all other areas. Our study found that, in general, respondents were more likely to be registered voters if they had abundant social capital, longer tenure (six years or more), and at least some higher education in the U.S. These factors are consistent with respondents in Philadelphia specifically, as 30% reported having many friends and family in the U.S., and the majority (75%) reported having lived in the U.S. for six years or more and having pursued additional higher education in the United States (66%).

Drawing upon the findings described above, as well as others explored in our full report, we have developed a series of recommendations for future action.

Read the full report at
imprintproject.org/stepstosuccess

MOVING FORWARD

Our findings provide crucial data to inform recommendations for service providers, funders, and policymakers who are seeking to tap the talents of underutilized skilled immigrants.

Recommendations for Service Providers: There is powerful evidence of the importance of social capital, English skills, self-improvement, and additional U.S. education in achieving economic success. We hope our study will inform the development of new programs that help immigrant jobseekers understand and develop the competencies they need to succeed in the U.S. labor market, and that providers will actively connect services designed specifically for immigrant professionals with so-called "mainstream" programs. Our specific recommendations include:

1. **Ensure that direct-service staff, and the immigrant professionals they serve, fully understand the importance of English skills in achieving economic success.** This is far from the first study to show strong correlations between English language fluency and economic success. However, our specific focus on immigrant professionals amplifies the importance of this finding for this specific population.

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2. **Communicate to immigrant jobseekers the vital role of networking and the strength of "weak ties" in the U.S. employment search.** Among U.S.-born jobseekers, these job-search techniques are widely known and are a key factor in gaining referrals to hidden job opportunities, yet a relatively low percentage of our respondents reported using these approaches. Given the correlation between possessing strong social capital and reporting better economic outcomes, it is imperative that immigrant professionals are not only informed about, but prepared to actively exercise, networking skills in their independent job searches. Practitioners should actively assess how immigrant professionals are currently building and utilizing social capital, and – having done so – help jobseekers develop the networking skills required to conduct white-collar job searches in the U.S.

3. **Educate immigrant professionals on the potential value of obtaining short-term "Made in America" supplements to their international education and experience.** Numerous findings in this report point to U.S. employers' strong preference for American experience and training. Immigrant professionals often acquire this asset the expensive way – by investing additional years and thousands of dollars in U.S. higher education, in many cases unnecessarily repeating a course of study already mastered in their home country. More cost-effective ways of acquiring the "Made in America" stamp include facilitating immigrants' exploration of other opportunities (e.g. short-term certificates, training programs, workplace internships, volunteer experience).

4. **Work to build connections between mainstream career pathways programs and services designed specifically for immigrant professionals.** As the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act is implemented, new opportunities are emerging to design "career pathways" that carry participants through multiple stages of education and training. Some short-term credentials available through these pathways may be appropriate for immigrant

professionals who are seeking alternative careers or intermediate steps before re-licensing in their original profession.

5. **Provide actionable information on gaps and opportunities to funders and policymakers.** Addressing the needs of immigrant professionals is a highly specialized field. Practitioners in this arena are well-positioned to identify cross-cutting issues affecting the communities they serve and to develop and iterate potential solutions. Communicating the results of these efforts to elected officials and funders is vital in facilitating their ability to support the expansion and replication of programs that work.

Recommendations for Funders: We hope these findings will spark grants for new education, training, and employment programs for college-educated immigrants, and that additional funding will be used to help bridge existing streams of public funding that are restricted in their ability to support this work. We also hope that foundations will support additional research to help providers design more effective programs. Our specific recommendations include:

1. **Ensure that support is targeted toward interventions that work.** In particular, programs serving immigrant professionals should include connections to English language learning opportunities at all levels, mechanisms to acquire U.S. workplace experience, and assistance in building and utilizing social capital.

2. **Use philanthropic dollars as a bridge between other funding streams.** Restrictions on public funding often hamper the ability of practitioners to provide a full range of support services over the length of time necessary to effectively serve immigrant professionals. For example, there are often few resources to support intermediate programs once immigrants test out of publicly funded entry-level English language classes and before they qualify for college-level instruction. Philanthropic dollars can provide vital resources to sustain participants' learning momentum between programs.

3. **Support additional practical research on the efficacy of different types of English language training.** Immigrant professionals are faced with a plethora of options: free and fee-based, college- and community-based, varied degrees of duration, intensity, and quality. Funding rigorous research to identify common factors in positive outcomes would help immigrant professionals become more informed consumers and help practitioners to develop better-designed programs.

4. **Consider sponsoring opportunities for immigrant professionals to build social capital and gain U.S. experience.** Given the importance of social capital in facilitating positive outcomes, funders should consider creative ways to improve immigrant professionals' ability to acquire and exercise it. Programs such as one-day job shadowing, or even coffee meetings between U.S.-born and immigrant professionals can help to widen newcomers' local networks. Likewise, given U.S. employers' strong preference for American experience and training, funders should consider sponsoring "mid-ternships"* or other short-term on-the-job experiences.

5. **Document and publicize successes. Across the workforce and adult education fields**, the program models that have been most widely adapted are those whose impact has been carefully documented by external evaluators and well publicized. Programs such as Washington State's I-BEST model spread rapidly across the country thanks in part to a study by Columbia University's Teachers College. Adapting and replicating successful programs for skilled immigrants would greatly advance the field.

* Similar to an internship, a mid-ternship is an opportunity for adults to gain additional American workplace experience in their field, or to explore a new field or occupation.

Recommendations for Policymakers: After a decade of budget cuts, we urge the restoration of funding to existing public workforce and adult education programs whose participants include immigrant professionals, and that public agencies better utilize data from existing resources to improve services and information about this population. Finally, we encourage public agencies to look within government to identify potential opportunities for immigrant professionals to acquire valuable American work experience. In particular, we recommend that policymakers:

1. **Fully fund existing public programs in adult education, training, and employment.** At the federal level, such programs have suffered significant cuts over the past decade, and immigrant participation has likewise declined. Funding programs at their full authorized levels can help to restore the capacity lost to the system, and ensure that eligible immigrant professionals get what they need to succeed.

2. **Improve data collection on immigrant professionals.** Identify opportunities in existing federal programs to collect data on nativity, English language proficiency, and foreign education or credentials, or analyze existing datasets for such information. In order to develop appropriate responses to constituent and community needs, policymakers need high-quality data illustrating the capacity of public programs to serve immigrant professionals.

3. **Use existing infrastructure to improve the quality of service provision.** For example, professional development activities for adult educators and refugee resettlement workers are both provided with federal funds. Policymakers should encourage the use of these existing pathways to improve the knowledge and ability of program staff to serve immigrant professionals.

4. **Utilize existing processes to disseminate information to immigrant professionals.** Websites and resources such as WelcometoUSA.gov and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' handbook for new lawful permanent residents are just two examples by which more and better information could be provided to immigrant professionals.

5. **Identify opportunities within government for immigrant professionals to acquire American experience.** Job shadowing, mentoring, internships or "mid-ternships," and other short-term workplace experiences can provide a valuable launching pad for immigrant professionals. Policymakers should consider whether there are opportunities – in the context of existing civil-service structures or otherwise – to facilitate newcomers' acquisition of U.S. experience within public agencies.

Endnotes

1. U.S. Census Bureau. 2013. *Selected Characteristics of the Native and Foreign-Born Populations.* http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_13_1YR_S0501&prodType=table Accessed September 1, 2015.
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ABOUT THIS STUDY

The findings in this report are based on a first-of-its-kind study about the economic success of college-educated immigrants in the United States.

Data was collected and analyzed from over 4,000 college-educated immigrant respondents through an online survey, and more than 5,500 immigrants of all educational levels via an audio survey.

The objective of the study was to increase the amount of publicly-available data on immigrant professionals which in its scarcity, has currently left gaps in understanding the specific barriers and opportunities that contribute to immigrant economic success. **Our goal is to inform policymakers, funders, and community organizations on how to better serve, integrate, and support college-educated immigrants.**

The study was conducted by World Education Services (WES) through its Global Talent Bridge program, the IMPRINT coalition, and the Institute for Immigration Research (IIR) at George Mason University. It was co-authored by Amanda Bergson-Shilcock & James Witte, Ph.D., with editorial assistance by Sylvia Rusin. Funding for the study was provided by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

Read the full report at: **imprintproject.org/stepstosuccess**

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