Skills Now, Not Later: Immigrant-Serving Organizations Weigh In

Survey Confirms Effective Investments in Skills Are Essential to Immigrant Integration Efforts; Finds Demand for Information on Policy/Advocacy Opportunities

September 2015

Findings from a recent survey of 200 immigrant-serving organizations reveal important gaps in immigrant workers’ access to adult education and workforce services. For both authorized and unauthorized immigrants, lack of access can have significant economic consequences.

While some have argued that education and training gaps can be addressed after undocumented individuals have obtained legal status, this survey reinforces the fact that limited access to skill development can actually hamper efforts to obtain status. For immigrants who are already work authorized, lack of access to skill development opportunities limits the potential economic payoff of immigration policy for local communities.

The survey also finds strong interest among immigrant-serving organizations in building their own organizational capacity and partnerships to address workforce issues and advocate for improved policies.

National Skills Coalition (NSC) asked survey respondents to weigh in on two important subgroups of immigrant workers: young undocumented immigrants known as Dreamers, and adult immigrants with credentials from abroad who are working in in low-wage jobs.

**Young Immigrant Dreamers**

*Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) allows young undocumented immigrants known as Dreamers to apply for temporary protection from deportation and a renewable 2-year work permit.*

*Lack of capacity in the nation’s adult education system prevents prospective DACA applicants from obtaining necessary education/credentials.*

Of the respondents serving Dreamers, 20 percent said prospective DACA applicants can’t find GED classes or other resources to meet the program’s educational requirements. And 40 percent reported that prospective DACA applicants in their community were encountering policy barriers that prevented them from pursuing educational goals.
Existing DACA recipients can’t access the education and training they need to fully contribute to their local economy.

Of the respondents serving Dreamers, 33 percent indicated that DACA recipients they serve have difficulties accessing higher education; 31 percent say these young people have problems accessing job training, including federally funded programs for which they are eligible.

Immigrant Professionals

There are just under 1 million individuals in the US who have degrees from abroad, but are employed in low-wage jobs.

Lack of access to language and skill development prevents full economic participation.

Of the respondents serving immigrant professionals, 75 percent indicate the need for more and improved services such as higher-level English classes. Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) indicate a need for clarification of immigrant professionals’ eligibility for federal employment and training programs; and 78 percent see a need for bridge coursework to fill small gaps in immigrants’ academic resumes.

Immigrant-Serving Organizations

Our survey asked organizations to identify workforce areas in which they would like to build their internal expertise and ability to advocate for policy change.

Immigrant-serving organizations have a keen interest in skills issues but want more information on skills policies and opportunities for advocacy

In particular, our survey revealed substantial demand for information about the recently-reauthorized Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) legislation, with more than 90 percent of respondents indicating “strong interest” in learning more about one or more WIOA topics. There was equally strong interest in learning more about the concept known as Career Pathways, a required activity under WIOA. More than 80% of respondents sought more information on Career Pathways, including 1 in 3 who wanted connections to peer organizations who are implementing Career Pathways.

About the survey: The 200 respondents primarily worked at nonprofit organizations (69%), community colleges (9%), and other higher education institutions (8%). The remainder were working in other roles serving immigrants or were retirees from relevant fields. Nearly half (48%) were program administrators or managers; another 10% were executive directors, and most of the remainder were in direct service roles. Services provided by respondents’ organizations included English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes (53%), general workforce training (39%), Adult Basic Education classes (32%), GED/High school equivalency classes (32%), and job training for specific occupations (24%), among others.