

# Building California's Immigrant Workforce

## Opportunities for Grantmakers



NATIONAL SKILLS COALITION  
Every worker. Every industry. A strong economy.

*Immigrants comprise one in three California workers. This diverse pool of individuals includes those fluent in English and those with limited English proficiency; those with very little formal education and those who came to the United States with foreign degrees and credentials; and those who are naturalized U.S. citizens or otherwise authorized to work and those who are undocumented.*

*Foundations have a variety of mechanisms by which they can equip California's immigrant workers to build their skills, advance in their careers, and earn family-sustaining wages. Each of these mechanisms can be adapted to fit a foundation's particular geographic, demographic, or issue-area focus, and they are listed below in no particular order.*

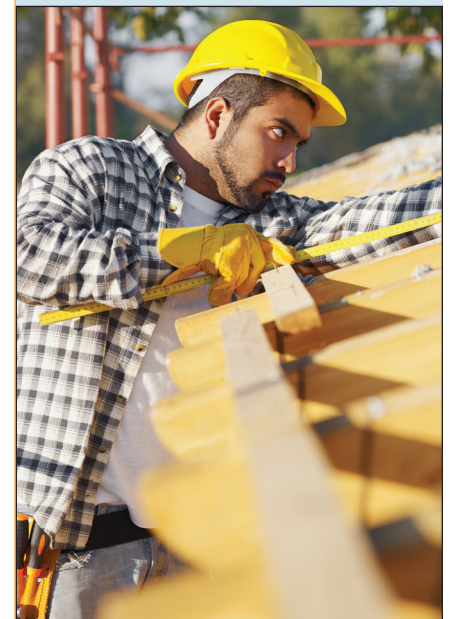
**1. Build capacity of immigrant-serving organizations to partner with the public workforce system.** Community-based organizations, worker centers, and other nonprofits often have longstanding relationships and deep expertise in serving immigrant workers, but limited experience collaborating with American Job Centers (formerly known as one-stops), community colleges, or career and technical education programs. Foundations can support the ability of immigrant-serving organizations to participate in local Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) planning processes, identify opportunities to align their services in WIOA's "career pathways," and help to establish WIOA-mandated industry sector partnerships, just to name a few.

**2. Provide "mortar" to fill in cracks between the bricks of public funding.** For example, California's Adult Education Block Grant (AEBG) and WIOA Title II support the *delivery* of adult education services, but relatively few funds are available for *program development* and *capacity building*. Foundations can enable adult education providers to make more effective use of public funds by supporting the development, evaluation, and replication of successful program models, such as Integrated Education and Training (IET). Funders can also invest in the development of bridge programs that ensure that English language learners have effective access to high-quality job training programs.

**3. Support innovative partnerships among community-based organizations and other adult education and workforce providers.** Many grassroots organizations that serve immigrants and other traditionally marginalized communities have acquired expertise and earned the trust of their constituents over time. Enabling these community-based organizations to effectively partner with larger, so-called "mainstream" education and workforce providers can create new on-ramps and expand employment opportunities for immigrants and other high-need jobseekers. Privately funded pilots in California have already helped establish groundbreaking collaborations between day-laborer centers and community colleges, equipping immigrant workers to earn industry-recognized credentials in an accessible way. Innovative collaborations can also be a "win-win" in helping all partners to compete successfully for federal discretionary grants.<sup>1</sup>

**4. Provide crucial "third party match" funds for SNAP Employment & Training (SNAP E&T) programs.** SNAP E&T is the workforce component of the federal food stamp program, supporting the ability of adults on food stamps to find employment or advance in their careers through education and training. Immigrant

*There are many ways foundations can equip California's immigrant workers to build their skills, advance in their careers, and earn family-sustaining wages.*





adults who are food-stamp eligible<sup>2</sup> can participate in SNAP E&T programs, provided they meet standard eligibility criteria. Most states, including California, could do more to capitalize on this federal resource, which reimburses states for 50 percent of eligible costs, provided the remaining 50 percent is covered by non-federal funds. Importantly, eligible costs include not only the education and training services themselves, but other costs directly related to workforce program participation—such as childcare, transportation, uniforms, work boots, driver’s licenses, textbooks, and more. Washington State has led the way in using SNAP E&T, including via innovative programs that serve Limited English Proficient (LEP) workers. Support from private foundations can help states and counties align local resources to fully capitalize on this opportunity.

## **5. Support efforts to promote coordination between immigrant-serving organizations and those focused on workforce development and training.**

Traditionally, immigrant-serving organizations and workforce development and training entities have worked in different silos, with limited opportunities for cross-sector learning and collaboration. By investing in efforts to bring these two sectors together via sustained engagement over time, funders can strengthen policy advocacy efforts aimed at improving systems, access, and service delivery for immigrant workers.

## **6. Support “earn while you learn” strategies that facilitate immigrant workers’ access to apprenticeships and other work-based learning opportunities.**

Apprenticeships are often described as “the other college, without the debt.” There are more than 700 registered apprenticeships in the United States, each of which provides a clearly defined pathway to a family-wage job. In recent years, apprenticeships have grown beyond their traditional home of the building trades to include a broader variety of industries. Immigrant-serving organizations have become partners in several federal apprenticeship programs, including the first-ever pre-apprenticeship in hospitality and others in the healthcare and information technology fields. Other work-based learning models such as internships and intensive job-shadowing have also proven to be effective mechanisms for helping young workers and/or new entrants to the labor force to gain crucial U.S. workplace experience and demonstrate their skills to potential employers.<sup>3</sup> One way that funders can encourage the development and implementation of these models is by supporting high-quality partnerships among employers, training providers, and immigrant-serving organizations.

## **Opportunities to Address Specific Population Groups**

While each of the above recommendations can help to address issues facing particular sub-populations of immigrants, there are a number that merit special emphasis, as outlined below. It should also be noted that from a *programmatic* perspective, focusing on individual sub-populations can allow targeted approaches. From a *policy* perspective, shaping universal policies can provide the best likelihood for obtaining significant and sustained resources.

*Traditionally, immigrant-serving organizations and workforce development and training entities have worked in different silos.*

## Young immigrants

Strategies to address immigrant youth and young adults' needs should include support for well-equipped "pathway navigators" who can help them make informed choices about job-training and educational opportunities, especially short-term certificate and credential programs. Robust navigation programs can help young people think through the big picture of their educational and vocational goals, and the variety of tools and resources that can help them achieve those goals. Investments can support policy advocacy to help young immigrants navigate the changing federal landscape with regard to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which could be discontinued under the incoming presidential administration. In particular, California is home to approximately 215,000 DACA recipients, some of whom may seek guidance in pursuing self-employment as independent contractors and/or incorporating their own businesses if they are unable to renew their federal work authorization. Individuals who choose to pursue this path may be aided by California's SB 1159 legislation, which allows individuals to apply for state occupational or professional licensure regardless of their immigration status.

## Immigrant professionals

Funders interested in supporting immigrants who have degrees and credentials from abroad, but are currently employed in low-wage work, have a variety of tools available to do so. They include supporting: advocacy to establish an ongoing public funding stream to support service-delivery programs for this population (which currently falls through the cracks of many federal and state programs); the creation of "mid-ternships" or mid-career internships for immigrant professionals to gain all-important professional workplace experience in the United States; and greater investment in high-quality professional and technical English that fills in the gaps between beginner-level community ESL programs and academic English college courses. All of these strategies can help immigrant professionals to identify high-demand career opportunities in their locality, and determine what blend of further education, U.S. job experience, and licensing/credentialing assistance is needed to attain their professional goals.

## Day laborers and domestic workers

Funders can address the needs of these workers by equipping worker centers and other support organizations to compete for federal funding (e.g., U.S. Department of Labor OSHA Susan Harwood grants) that can be used for training. Investments can also support policies that propel workers' progression through career pathways, particularly via alignment—as appropriate—between worker centers and the broader education and workforce systems. Additionally, philanthropic resources can help develop programs that "meet workers where they are" and allow them to earn industry-recognized credentials and obtain occupational licensing in their chosen fields without having to travel to a college campus.

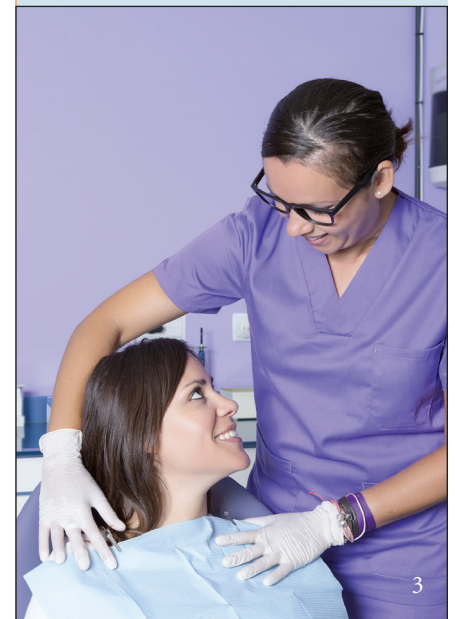
## Farmworkers

Funders can amplify the federal investment in farmworker programs currently made through WIOA Section 167 (relating to migrant and seasonal farmworkers) by supporting opportunities for peer learning across different states. Such learning can provide the impetus for expanding existing innovative collaborations with community colleges that provide farmworkers with career ladders both within agriculture and in other occupations that are needed in farm work (e.g., machine repair).

## Stay-at-home parents of young children

While this population may not be immediately thought of in relation to workforce development, many parents are simply "stopping out" of the workforce to raise children and will return, either as wage workers or entrepreneurs, once their children are old enough for school. In the meantime, funders can support their continued English language and other basic skills acquisition. In addition to representing perhaps the

*Philanthropic resources can help develop programs that "meet workers where they are" and allow them to earn industry-recognized credentials and obtain occupational licensing in their chosen fields without having to travel to a college campus.*



single most valuable workforce-preparation strategy, high-quality English learning can also reduce social isolation, improve participants' children's educational outcomes, and provide opportunities for civic engagement and leadership development.

### Entry-level (incumbent) workers

Immigrant workers who are currently employed in low-wage jobs may struggle to identify opportunities for advancement. Funders can invest in the economic mobility of these workers by amplifying the efforts of “high-road” employers who invest in their workers' skill-building, and supporting sector partnerships that bring together multiple firms in the same industry to identify talent pipeline needs and design solutions. Nationally, such partnerships (sometimes including labor unions) have created myriad opportunities for existing workers to upskill and attain more highly-paid positions.

### Undocumented individuals

Undocumented individuals represent a notable fraction of several of the groups described above, including day laborers and domestic workers; farmworkers; young immigrants; and more. Funders seeking to improve undocumented people's access to services should be aware that the wide array of publicly and privately funded workforce services include an equally wide range of eligibility requirements. Given this patchwork system, funders have numerous avenues for improving undocumented workers' access, such as providing mortar to fill in the cracks between public funding (as described above), and supporting the ability of organizations serving undocumented people (such as worker centers) to provide in-house education and job training services, while also aligning as appropriate with the broader workforce system. Funders can also invest in the development of innovative models that help undocumented people earn meaningful credentials and progress through career ladders, taking advantage of California-specific opportunities in occupational licensing while respecting legal and other constraints at the national level.

### For more information

Contact Felecia Bartow at [felecia@gcir.org](mailto:felecia@gcir.org) or Amanda Bergson-Shilcock at [amandabs@nationalskillscoalition.org](mailto:amandabs@nationalskillscoalition.org).

Additional resources are available at [www.gcir.org](http://www.gcir.org) and [www.nationalskillscoalition.org](http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org).



*Funders can invest in the economic mobility of entry-level workers by supporting industry sector partnerships that identify local talent pipeline needs and design solutions.*

### Endnotes

- 1 While the specific grant opportunities differ over time, recent areas in which immigrant groups have received funding by partnering with workforce groups include federal apprenticeship grants, the TechHire initiative, and Job-Driven National Emergency Grants.
- 2 Determining SNAP eligibility is a complex process that includes understanding federal restrictions as well as state-specific requirements. More information is available from the National Immigration Law Center at: [www.nilc.org/issues/economic-support/](http://www.nilc.org/issues/economic-support/)
- 3 Learn more in *Promising Practices in Work-based Learning for Youth*, a publication of the National Youth Employment Coalition and National Skills Coalition, viewable at: [www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/10-4-NSC-YouthWorkBasedLearning\\_v4.pdf](http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/resources/publications/file/10-4-NSC-YouthWorkBasedLearning_v4.pdf)