



Serving Internationally Trained Professionals in IELCE Activities

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The **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act** (WIOA) defines Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) as "education services provided to English language learners who are adults, including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries, that enables such adults to achieve competency in the English language and acquire the basic and more advanced skills needed to function effectively as parents, workers, and citizens in the United States."¹

The **Enhancing Access for Refugees and New Americans** project aims to support adult educators in developing and delivering high-quality IELCE/IET programming in alignment with an immigrant integration approach.

Enhancing Access Spotlights describe and provide examples of specific aspects of IELCE/IET implementation.

Adult education programs often provide English language acquisition (ELA) services to Internationally Trained Professionals (ITPs). These programs can leverage Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) activities to offer ITPs more individualized and strategic services. ITPs are individuals with postsecondary degrees and professional credentials from other countries. According to a 2021 study by the Migration Policy Institute, "almost half of recent arrivals (i.e., immigrants who arrived in the past 5 years) have a bachelor's degree or higher" and two million college-educated immigrants are either unemployed or underemployed.²

ITPs frequently attend adult education programs; they often take English language acquisition classes or participate in IELCE activities. This spotlight shares promising practices that states, programs, and individual practitioners can use to support ITPs in applying their assets, skills, and credentials to achieve economic integration. Many of these practices support ITPs as they navigate career pathways, especially those that include IELCE and Integrated Education and Training (IET) activities.

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¹ Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), H.R. 803, 113th Cong., §203(12), (2014), <https://www.congress.gov/113/bills/hr803/BILLS-113hr803enr.pdf>.

² Jeanne Batalova and Michael Fix. *Leaving Money on the Table: The Persistence of Brain Waste among College-Educated Immigrants* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2021), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/mpi-brain-waste-analysis-june2021-final.pdf>.

Leveraging ITP Assets

ITPs bring many assets to their communities, educational programs, and workplaces. These assets include international credentials, multiple languages and literacies, professional work experience, and experience building social capital.

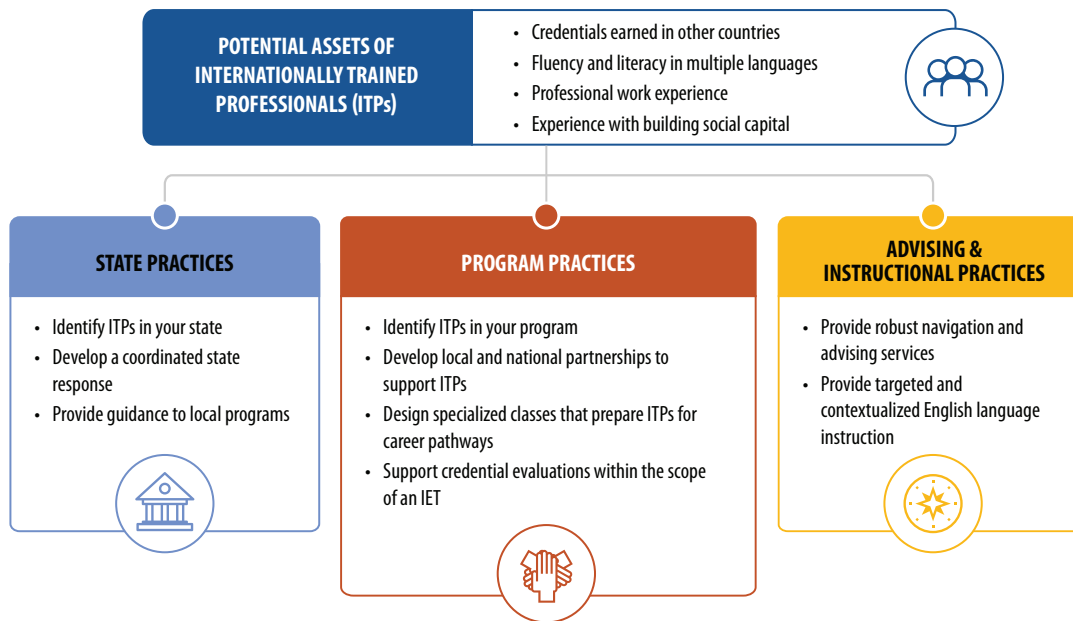
What is Social Capital?

Social capital can be defined as “social confidence, social integration and social participation.”³ A 2015 survey of ITPs found a “powerful correlation between the size of an immigrant’s self-reported social network and his or her likelihood of achieving success.”⁴ Because social and professional networks can take a while to establish, ITPs may have difficulty leveraging their other assets without the social capital to enter and advance in the workforce in the United States. They may

need guidance on how to use their networks, industry-based knowledge, and professional experience as assets. Support from programs and organizations, such as professional mentors, internships, or fellowships, can help ITPs form new connections and access additional opportunities and support.⁵

Exhibit 1 shows common potential assets of ITPs, and strategies that states, programs, and instructors may be able to use to effectively serve ITPs.

Exhibit 1. Leveraging Assets to Effectively Serve ITPs



³ Forouzan Tonkaboni, Alireza Yousefy, and Narges Keshtiaray, “Description and Recognition the Concept of Social Capital in Higher Education System,” *International Education Studies* 6, no. 9 (August 16, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v6n9p40>.

⁴ Amanda Bergson-Shilcock and James Witte, *Steps to Success: Integrating Immigrant Professionals in the United States* (New York: World Education Services, 2015), <https://knowledge.wes.org/GlobalTalentBridge-Report-Steps-to-Success-Integrating-Immigrant-Professionals-in-the-US.html>.

⁵ Margie McHugh and Madeleine Morawski, *Unlocking Skills: Successful Initiatives for Integrating Foreign-Trained Immigrant Professionals* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2017), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/IntegratingForeignTrainedProfessionals-FINAL.pdf>.

Serving ITPs in IELCE/IET Career Pathways

IELCE/IET programming can accelerate the progress of ITPs toward careers that match their education and training. States, adult education programs, teachers, and navigators can take the steps described in the next section to improve the experience and outcomes for ITPs enrolled in adult education programming.

State Practices

States can support adult education programs in serving ITPs by providing guidance, technical assistance, and resources to identify current and potential students who are ITPs and by leveraging expertise across the state.

IDENTIFY ITPs IN YOUR STATE

By understanding how many ITPs are being served in a state's adult education system, states can provide guidance and support to programs to improve services for ITPs. This includes guidance to programs on keeping accurate documentation of how many ITPs are enrolled in their programs (which are frequently reported through the National Reporting System).

Additionally, states can review data to identify potential ITPs that could be served by their adult education system. [County-level data](#) or [state-level data](#) can show ITP population size in a state or region. One way to review Census educational attainment and English proficiency data by county is by using the U.S. Census Bureau's interactive map.⁶ On the map:

- Use the geography filter to find the county and state.
- Select "Educational attainment" for more information about the immigrant population in the selected area.

Practice in Action

Some states require that adult education programs collect and submit data on the number of students who have degrees and credentials from other countries. For example, in Texas, adult education and literacy (AEL) programs are required to collect students' prior educational background during intake and orientation. The state provides technical assistance on analyzing the data, adding supplemental intake questions, and offers professional development to local programs to address the specialized needs of the ITP population. Texas further incentivizes more intensive services for ITPs when part of a career pathway.

⁶ Explore the U.S. Census Bureau's interactive map of Census data: https://data.census.gov/map?layer=VT_2020_040_00_PP_D1&loc=38.8800-98.0000,z3.0000.

DEVELOP A COORDINATED STATE RESPONSE

A coordinated and centralized state response to serving ITPs helps programs increase their capacity and leverage support for ITPs across the state. Career pathways for ITPs may include regulated and unregulated occupations. Regulated occupations are generally controlled by state or local law and may have a governing body.⁷ They include teachers, many types of healthcare occupations, and lawyers. Sharing ITP pathways information statewide can save program staff time and improve awareness and use of state resources.

Practice in Action

Recognizing the need for specialized knowledge and resources to support ITPs statewide, the Texas Workforce Commission convened AEL providers as part of the 2019 Skilled Immigrant Integration Program (SIIP), in collaboration with World Education Services. The Texas Center for the Advancement of Literacy & Learning, the statewide professional development center, developed a train-the-trainer session for the field to expand capacity to deliver ITP services. In 2021, many of these practitioners and leaders from adult education programs came together to form [Synergy Texas](#), a hub providing information, expertise, and curated program- and student-facing resources for serving ITPs.

PROVIDE GUIDANCE TO LOCAL PROGRAMS

Programs may benefit from additional clarification and support from the state, especially about how to measure and demonstrate or document learning for ITPs. Standardized adult education tests may not be the most applicable or relevant measure for ITPs, who may have strong literacy skills in other languages and are often focused on reentering the workforce at a level that recognizes their experience and education. States can help programs consider using training milestones, documentation via a third-party exam, or college credit accumulation to measure progress and learning.

Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) Program Memo

19-2 states: “States and eligible providers may use AEFLA [Adult Education and Family Literacy Act] funds to pay for occupational certificates and/or credentials within an AEFLA-funded IET program, consistent with the requirements of the AEFLA program regulations at 34 C.F.R. §463.36. Generally, the certificates and credentials must be necessary to achieve the purposes of the IET program as described in 34 C.F.R. §§463.36-463.38.”

Additionally, states can help programs understand the flexibilities inherent in WIOA. For example, Program Memo 19-2⁸ makes it clear that, to the extent that a credential evaluation would be “necessary to achieve the purposes of the IET program,” the use of IELCE

⁷ Read more about regulated professions: <https://sites.ed.gov/international/professional-licensure/>.

⁸ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, Program Memorandum OCTAE 19-2: Allowable Use of Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Funds for Integrated Education and Training Programs – Frequently Asked Questions, August 15, 2019. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/octae-program-memo-19-2.pdf>.

funds to support credential evaluations is an allowable expenditure as long as the cost is necessary, reasonable, and allocable to the adult education program. For example, if an ITP who was trained as a nurse in their home country is enrolled in a licensed practice nursing IET, their nursing

degree has clear relevance to the IET. This means funds could be used to support credential evaluation. States can issue guidance or provide technical assistance to help programs determine when it is appropriate to use AEFLA funds for the purposes of credential evaluation.

Program Practices

Programs can adopt the following practices to maximize services for ITPs. Understanding the assets and needs of ITPs enables programs to better design services and develop partnerships that meet the unique needs and leverage the assets of each ITP.

IDENTIFY ITPs IN YOUR PROGRAM

The first step in serving ITPs is finding out who they are, what their degrees and credentials are, their work experience, and which programs would help them meet their career goals in the United States. Intake forms and processes should be designed to make it easy for ITPs to share relevant information. For example, intake form questions could gather information about an ITP's:

- educational degrees and what country they were earned in;
- credentials, licenses, and professional certifications and what country they were earned in; and
- professional work experience, length, and location.

Accurate data help demonstrate the need for serving this population through state and/or federal reporting. It can also help programs identify career pathways or programming for students. For example, if there are multiple students with a healthcare background, they might benefit from a healthcare-track career pathway that builds on that background.

Practice in Action

Some adult education programs in the United States have developed pathways for ITPs to participate in paraprofessional training programs that lead to jobs in the local school districts. For example, [Adult Options in Education](#) in Hopkins, Minnesota, offers a sequence of IELCE/IET classes, starting with an introductory class on jobs in schools, part of a career pathway that can lead to a job in the district as a paraprofessional. ITPs with BA degrees or beyond can apply their educational credentials to this career pathway, putting them on track to meeting the state requirements for paraeducators and educators. Another program, WES Global Talent Bridge's [Teacher Bridge](#) project, promotes pathways to teaching for internationally trained educators in six states.

DEVELOP LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS TO SUPPORT ITPs

By establishing local partnerships, programs can access resources and make connections for ITPs. Potential partners include immigrant service providers, Offices of New Americans, and refugee resettlement organizations.⁹ Refugee-serving organizations have extensive knowledge and connections and provide many services to refugee populations. Many of these organizations receive Refugee Career Pathways grant funding, which help refugees enter a career pathway that leads to self-sufficiency. The funding can cover services such as assistance in creating personalized career development plans; classroom and work-based learning opportunities; career coaching and mentoring; connections with educational opportunities, apprenticeships and on-the-job training; recredentialing and credential recognition; and vocational English language training.¹⁰

Partnerships with employers create opportunities for additional funding, occupational training, and long-term support for transitioning ITPs into good jobs that pay family-sustaining wages. Local chambers of commerce could help ITPs build social capital through professional networks or mentoring relationships. Likewise, programs can partner with industry and professional associations to learn about certification and education requirements in the industry and educate potential employers about the benefits of working with ITPs.

Practice in Action

In Portland, Maine, the Office of Economic Opportunity in partnership with the Portland Regional Chamber, has developed the [Portland of Opportunity](#) program, which connects ITPs with local professionals. ITPs can receive mentorship, be connected to potential employers, and build their professional networks.

Finally, partnerships with community colleges and universities can provide technical and academic supports to help ITPs pursue postsecondary education or fulfill credit and course requirements. For example, there are several organizations that aim to support internationally trained nurses in entering the healthcare workforce in the United States. One such organization, the NYC Welcome Back Center at LaGuardia Community College, provides case management, licensure support, referrals, and coursework. In some cases, postsecondary institutions can provide financial support and advising for the credential evaluation process. For example, Georgia Piedmont Technical College places an emphasis on ensuring there is a low financial burden on students through braided funding and maximizing financial aid options.¹¹ They also provide guidance to ITPs to help them access credential evaluations that fit with their goals as students.

⁹ Find organizations in your state funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement, an office of the Administration for Children & Families: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/map/find-resources-and-contacts-your-state>.

¹⁰ Learn more about the Refugee Career Pathways grant program: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/programs/refugees/refugee-career-pathways>. Explore current grantees: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/programs/refugees/refugee-career-pathways/grants>.

¹¹ Learn more about how Georgia Piedmont Technical College creates accessible programming for refugees, including ITPs, in *Serving Refugees in IELCE Activities*: https://iincs.ed.gov/sites/default/files/14175_EARN_Refugee_Spotlightv3.pdf.

DEVELOP NATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS TO SUPPORT ITPs

There are national organizations that specialize in supporting ITPs, such as [World Education Services](#) and [Upwardly Global](#). They provide resources, advocacy, and partnerships that can help programs serve ITPs. Many of these organizations work in specific states, regions, or cities, though many resources are available regardless of location. Partnerships can open up opportunities for advocacy and additional funding to support programming for ITPs.

DESIGN SPECIALIZED CLASSES THAT PREPARE ITPs FOR CAREER PATHWAYS

Some programs offer customized classes for ITPs. These classes prepare ITPs for the next steps on a career pathway, such as workforce training, IELCE/IET activities, or other education programs. Although many ITPs have advanced degrees and work experiences in their home or other countries, they may need to learn how to navigate the U.S. workforce, job search process, and societal and workplace norms. Specialized classes can focus on the specific English and workplace skills they need or offer sector-specific language instruction to help ITPs build targeted vocabulary. Programs can also work with employers to offer onsite workplace training programs that provide ELA instruction to help ITPs learn workplace-specific terminology, improve their English language skills, and gain other skills that may help them progress in their careers.

Practice in Action

National organizations, such as World Education Services' Skilled Immigrant Integration Program, provide technical assistance, coaching, and advising to communities, including adult education programs, to develop workforce initiatives that serve ITPs.

Practice in Action

The [Literacy Council of Tyler, Texas](#), developed a 9-week intensive course for ITPs focused on the skills and language they would need to successfully navigate the U.S. workforce. Topics include resume improvement, interview preparation, networking and job search, and translation and evaluation of degrees and credentials into their U.S. equivalents.

SUPPORT CREDENTIAL EVALUATIONS WITHIN THE SCOPE OF AN IET

As previously discussed, states may allow and support using AEFLA funds to pay for the evaluation of foreign credentials that are relevant to an IET program.¹² Therefore, programs may, in accordance with any state policy, help ITPs determine whether having their credentials evaluated would be beneficial. For example, credential evaluations can be used for occupational licensure or certification. They can also support the transfer of credits or credentials to applicable U.S. education

or training programs. Evaluation reports may include information about degree equivalency or credit transfer.

If determined to be beneficial to the ITP and relevant to the IET program, programs can contact a credential evaluator and support ITPs through the process. Sample questions to consider before starting the credential evaluation process can be found in [Advising and Coaching Students with Foreign Degrees and Credentials](#).¹³

Advising and Instructional Practices

Career navigators and instructors provide direct services to ITPs through customized services and curricula as described in this section. Training and resources for navigators and instructors are also listed.

PROVIDE ROBUST NAVIGATION AND ADVISING SERVICES

Career navigators or advisors can help address the unique needs of ITPs, connecting them to the classes and services that will meet their needs.¹⁴ For example, most ITPs do not need to earn a GED® or high school equivalency to access employment in the United States if they have earned a similar degree in their native country. ITPs can more quickly become gainfully employed with the right help.

Practice in Action

Navigators and advisors have an important role to play in career pathways and IELCE/IET programming. Review the *Enhancing Access Spotlight* on the role of navigators in IELCE/IET career pathways for potential “touchpoints” for the navigator, as well as program examples.¹⁴

¹² Program Memorandum OCTAE 19-2, <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/octae-program-memo-19-2.pdf>.

¹³ National College Transition Network, "Advising and Coaching Students with Foreign Degrees and Credentials," 2021, <https://www.collegetransition.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Advising-Students-with-Foreign-Credentials-5-21.pdf>.

¹⁴ Explore the Enhancing Access Spotlight, *The Role of Navigators in IELCE/IET Career Pathways*, for more information about how navigators can serve English learners, including ITPs: <https://lincs.ed.gov/sites/default/files/14175EARNNavigatorSpotlight.pdf>.

PROVIDE TARGETED AND CONTEXTUALIZED ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION INSTRUCTION

ITPs may benefit from language instruction that is contextualized to specific sectors or includes vocabulary related to navigating the U.S. workforce. ITPs who have advanced reading and vocabulary skills might benefit from practicing targeted communication and networking to accelerate their progress.

IELCE and IET programming lend themselves to contextualized instruction, given their requirements to integrate English language acquisition instruction with instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship or civic participation (IELCE) or occupational training and workforce preparation activities (IET). By using a contextualized approach, IELCE and IET programming can help ITPs progress toward their linguistic, economic, and civic goals more quickly.

Resources

Explore the resources below to learn more about national organizations working to support ITPs, advising and instructional tools, and resources for improving the ITP experience.

National Partner Resources

National organizations serving ITPs are listed below. Many of these organizations work in specific states, regions, or cities, though many resources are available nationwide.

- [World Education Services](#) (WES) runs several initiatives that support immigrant and refugee professionals' success in the United States. For example, the [Skilled Immigrant Integration Program](#) (SIIP) offers communities an opportunity to use technical assistance from WES Global Talent Bridge to support state and local immigrant and refugee workforce inclusion initiatives. It also hosts a [map of programs](#) that serve and support ITPs and an interactive [data map](#) featuring national and state-level workforce data on immigrant skill underutilization.
- The [Office of New Americans State Network](#) can provide advocacy support and help identify funding opportunities.
- [Upwardly Global](#) is a national organization that helps immigrants and refugees who have international credentials restart their careers in the United States. Although eligible ITPs can access some of their services [on their own](#), Upwardly Global also partners with workforce development, adult education, and community colleges to provide specialized content to ITPs.
- The [Welcome Back Initiative](#) helps ITPs prepare for and enter employment in healthcare in the United States. It helps increase the pipeline of culturally and linguistically diverse workers for our healthcare system. The national network currently includes ten centers in eight states and has served almost 15,000 ITPs with degrees and experience in healthcare.
- The Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education (CCCIE) is a national network of community colleges that provides immigrants and refugees full access to higher education opportunities. It collaborates with other national initiatives to bring together resources and build partnerships to help community college practitioners better serve internationally educated immigrants.

Advising and Instructional Tools

These resources for advisors, career navigators, coaches, and instructors focus on the specialized instructions and advising that ITPs need, including how to conduct credential evaluations and better understand the complex world of regulated and unregulated professions in the United States.

- [Supporting Skilled Immigrants: A Toolkit for ESL Practitioners](#): Helps ELA teachers in thinking about language skills and also useful for those who advise ITPs in any setting.
- [Advising and Coaching Students with Foreign Degrees and Credentials Job Aid](#): Wondering how and whether you should support students in evaluating their credentials? Read this first to avoid common pitfalls.
- [What Adult Educators Need to Know About Serving Skilled Immigrants](#): A quick brief of the essential components of serving this population.

Resources to Complete the Credential Evaluation Process

- Accreditation Services: [National Association of Credential Evaluation Services](#) (NACES) provides a list of members offering evaluation services.
- Translation Services: Search the [American Translators Association](#) (ATA) website for certified translators.
- [WES Tools](#): WES provides free tools to help ITPs understand the requirements and possible outcomes of an official evaluation. Tools include a grade point average comparison tool, an unofficial self-reported free degree equivalency, and a preview of the documents required for an evaluation.

Licensing Guides and Pathways

Many states set their own licensing requirements for regulated professions. Generalized guides provide information about basic professional requirements.

- WES's [Career Pathways for Internationally Trained Immigrants and Refugees](#) page provides sector-specific guides and links to state-level guides developed by partners.
- The [Immigrant Job Opportunities: Map to Success](#) is an interactive tool for immigrants and other workers with information on select career paths in the United States.
- Upwardly Global's [Professional Licensing Guides](#) have information for those reentering regulated professions in selected states, including California, Illinois, Michigan, New Hampshire, and New York.