



# GATEWAY JOBS IN OUR ECONOMY

HELPING NEWCOMERS SUCCEED IN THE AMERICAN WORLD OF WORK

Welcoming  
Center for  
NEW PENNSYLVANIANS

*Connecting immigrants, employers,  
and communities*



THE BEST PREPARATION FOR

# SUCCEEDING IN THE AMERICAN WORKPLACE

IS TO **BE** IN THE AMERICAN WORKPLACE. HOW DO WE KNOW? THIS REPORT SHOWS THAT EVEN LOW-LEVEL JOBS WITH MODEST PAY AND LIMITED HOURS CAN IMPROVE THE LIFE-LONG EARNING POTENTIAL OF IMMIGRANT WORKERS WHO ARE LEARNING THE ROPES OF THE AMERICAN WORLD OF WORK.

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We all want to live in a place with a strong economy. On the most personal and immediate level, that means we want to be able to get a job, pay for a place to live and food to eat, and take care of our children and parents. On a policy level, we want our neighbors to have opportunities to apply their work ethic and talents too, regardless of whether that neighbor is a neurosurgeon or a janitor.

But how do we *create* a strong economy? That question bedevils citizens and policymakers alike with even greater urgency in the midst of a recession.

This report cannot hope to address such a complex topic definitively. However, from the Welcoming Center's vantage point as an experienced economic and workforce development organization in one of the largest cities in the U.S., **we have a unique perspective on a key component of a healthy economy: Gateway Jobs.**<sup>1</sup>

Gateway jobs are the very first step on the workforce ladder: sometimes tedious, often low-paying, but always providing a critical entrée to the world of work. Having placed more than 700 workers in jobs ranging from elite to introductory, the Welcoming Center has a keen understanding of the importance – and the limitations – of gateway jobs.

## THE IMPETUS BEHIND THIS REPORT IS THREE-FOLD:

- To spotlight gateway jobs as a necessary part of Pennsylvania's economy
- To illustrate how such jobs can usher workers into more enduring and rewarding positions
- To showcase gateway job success stories

Armed with this information, policymakers and workforce development professionals can make more informed and effective decisions.

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<sup>1</sup> Other components — such as business start-up and innovation opportunities, career ladders, living-wage jobs, and high-status jobs — are equally important. The fact that this report focuses on gateway jobs is not intended to devalue the importance of the other components.

**What is a gateway job?**

A gateway job is a low-wage position that requires only basic skills. Common characteristics of gateway jobs are:

- Low wages, generally hovering around the minimum wage
- Unpredictable and highly variable hours
- Basic responsibilities with few opportunities for on-the-job training or advancement

Despite these limitations, ***gateway jobs are often the best possible option for a subset of workers.*** They provide critical opportunities for some youth who have had no previous connection to the workforce, and some work-authorized immigrants who have limited formal work experience. They are also a useful lowest-rung position for employers, who benefit from the scheduling flexibility and limited training costs entailed. Some housekeeping, health aide, and food service jobs can be considered gateway jobs due to erratic hours and/or low wages.

Although a gateway job generally does *not* provide a family-sustaining wage, it can be a critical stepping stone toward economic security for workers who cannot make an immediate leap to higher-paying work.

Thus, gateway jobs are almost never the end goal. The majority of immigrants who start off in a gateway job work their way up to family-sustaining jobs. But without a gateway job as a door, those other opportunities would have been closed to them.

**A NOTE ABOUT IMMIGRATION STATUS**

The focus of this report is legal, work-authorized immigrants. It is important to understand that there are more than a dozen different legal statuses, including green-card holder (legal permanent resident), refugee, and aslyee, among others. Where this report discusses workers who take jobs in the informal or cash economy, it is with the understanding that these workers possess legal authorization to work, but are unable to access legitimate payroll jobs, often for the reasons outlined in Section 5 – Employment Barriers: A Closer Look.



# WHO NEEDS A GATEWAY JOB?

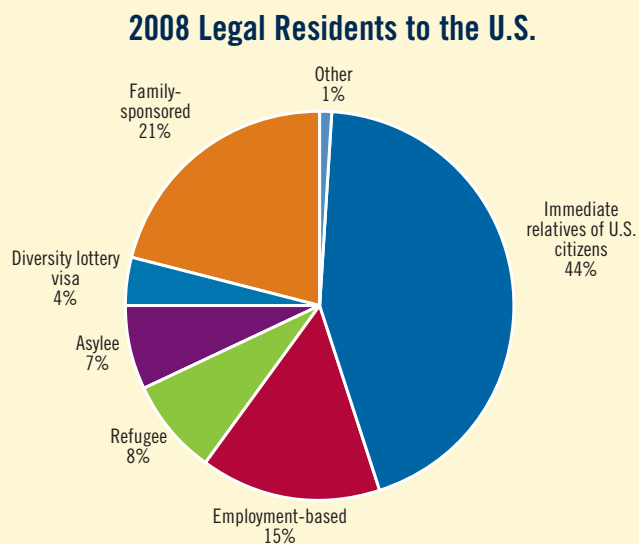
In order to better understand how a gateway job — an option of last resort for many — is a major accomplishment for some, it helps to know more about the backgrounds of those we have placed in gateway jobs.

**It is also critical to understand that the majority of immigrant jobseekers do *not* need gateway jobs.** As illustrated in the chart below, every year the U.S. welcomes approximately 1 million work-authorized immigrants, including those sponsored by family members, recruited by employers, and admitted under the diversity visa lottery program.<sup>2</sup> Our immigration process often favors applicants who have higher levels of education and greater fluency in English. They are frequently the elite of their own countries — ambitious strivers whose families were able to pay for their education and professional training.

However, a subset of immigrant workers do *not* come from elite backgrounds. They may have had their education disrupted by years of war. Their formal work experience may have been limited by heavy caregiving responsibilities, by living in an isolated rural area, or by social expectations for their gender. Some are refugees or asylees who had little or no time to prepare for a new life as they fled from persecution.

Unlike regions whose newcomer population is made up of a small handful of language or ethnic groups, Philadelphia absorbs the energy of a wide range of new residents, who bring talents and experiences from around the globe. In addition to religious and linguistic diversity, our region’s immigrants also bring educational and professional diversity.

Top Countries of Origin Philadelphia Metro Area
India
Mexico
China
Vietnam
Korea
Italy
Ukraine
Philippines
Jamaica
Germany



Data for these charts available from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 American Community Survey and the Department of Homeland Security, 2008 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics at [www.dhs.gov/files/statistics/publications/yearbook.shtm](http://www.dhs.gov/files/statistics/publications/yearbook.shtm)

<sup>2</sup> Details can be found in the 2008 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics ([www.dhs.gov/files/statistics/publications/yearbook.shtm](http://www.dhs.gov/files/statistics/publications/yearbook.shtm)). More information about the diversity visa lottery is available from U.S. Department of State ([http://travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants/types/types\\_1322.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants/types/types_1322.html))

## WHO NEEDS A GATEWAY JOB?

These workers are ready and willing to pursue legal, tax-paying jobs, but are unfamiliar with the process and norms for finding work in the U.S. They often face multiple barriers to finding employment. In this report, we describe the process that they must go through to become self-sufficient participants in the U.S. workforce, and how those barriers can be overcome.

**A typical gateway job candidate has virtually no previous exposure to an American workplace, which is a significant drawback in the eyes of most employers. In addition, gateway job candidates often face additional barriers, including:**

- Little or no English capacity
- Limited literacy in any language
- Limited formal education
- Physical disability
- Caregiving responsibilities
- History of war or trauma in home country

Ensuring that these workers are absorbed into the labor market is beneficial not only to the workers themselves, but also to our economy as a whole.

### GATEWAY JOBS AND THE LIVING WAGE

A growing body of research has supported the movement for living-wage jobs. This “self-sufficiency standard” is a critical tool for helping policymakers calculate the true economic situation of wage earners. Because the gap between the minimum wage and a living wage can be substantial, living-wage campaigns can have a significant positive effect on the fortunes and prospects of entry-level workers in gateway jobs. For more information, see: [www.pathwayspa.org/self-sufficiency.html](http://www.pathwayspa.org/self-sufficiency.html)

It's clear why gateway jobs are undesirable for the majority of workers – they don't pay well, they tend to be part-time, and the work itself is often monotonous. But for a subset of immigrant workers, such jobs represent a huge success. For these workers, finding their first job in the U.S. is a tremendous challenge, but once they have achieved this goal, a door has been opened.

A gateway job may be an immigrant's first formal paycheck and her first experience working with English-speaking colleagues. It represents the all-important U.S. experience for her to put on a resume, and a vital opportunity to learn firsthand how the American workplace functions.

**We expect U.S.-born teenagers to gain their first work experience in a gateway job; why not a recent immigrant who has even less knowledge of the U.S. workplace?**

In addition, many immigrants are not eligible to receive public benefits such as welfare. Thus, they do not have outside financial support as they work to increase their job skills or English language proficiency. They must find employment.

While a family-sustaining wage job should always be the ultimate goal, it is not realistic to think that all immigrant jobseekers can find — let alone succeed in — such jobs in their very first American work experience. Instead, the first experience is likely to be a gateway job, which then unleashes other promising opportunities.

## CASE STUDY



### Chidi\*

After leaving the war-torn country of Sierra Leone, Chidi came to the U.S. in search of the American dream. Although Chidi speaks fluent English, his educational level is the equivalent of the sixth grade here in the U.S. Chidi's Employment Specialist at the Welcoming Center, wanting to help him gain marketable job skills while on the job, connected him to a warehouse job with a major retailer. The position exposes Chidi to machinery and technology skills that are useful for other jobs. Although his starting salary is only \$7.75, the job offers many opportunities for career progression as well as the experience of working for a well-known retailer. The company also allows for flexibility, including a shift that is 3 days a week, 12 hours a day. This option would allow Chidi the time to go back to school and complete his GED. If Chidi decides he wants to move into a new position at the company, such as driving a forklift, training would be paid for by his employer.

\* Name has been changed for privacy

Earlier in this report we began to illustrate the primary barriers confronting candidates who seek out gateway jobs. The challenges that these individuals face may appear straightforward. However, even entry-level jobs often entail a strenuous, multi-step hiring process which can be daunting to a new arrival.

Furthermore, it is important to highlight that building an employment history tends to occur in parallel with activities to break down other barriers, such as learning English, acquiring employer-recognized credentials, etc.

**We should not expect that new Americans should first overcome all of their barriers to employment before seeking a job. On the contrary, the best preparation for being in the American workplace is to *be* in the American workplace. This allows workers to gain useful experience while addressing other barriers in their off hours.**

### COMMON BARRIERS INCLUDE:

**Limited Exposure to American Business Culture (LEABC):** Many jobseekers who come to the Welcoming Center have recently arrived in the U.S. and have not had a chance to experience U.S. business culture firsthand. Others have worked exclusively in the informal economy and within their own immigrant community, providing them limited opportunity to interact with native-born Americans or a formal work culture. And still others are disheartened by having repeatedly tried and failed to break through to jobs in mainstream American workplaces.

### CASE STUDY



#### Fadwa\*

Fadwa came to the U.S. from Iraq when her husband was transferred to a stateside job with the U.S. military. Although she had a career in her home country, her very limited English and unfamiliarity with the American job market made it difficult for her to know how to start working in the U.S.

A Welcoming Center Employment Specialist tapped into our extensive pool of partner employers and connected Fadwa to a home healthcare agency, working with a patient who preferred an Arabic-speaking aide. Fadwa now works 24 hours a week, earning \$10 per hour. She uses her free time to attend English classes. In one year, she should speak enough English to train as a Certified Nurse Aide. This certificate, combined with the U.S. work experience she is now acquiring, will help her find employment with better pay and more hours.

\* Name has been changed for privacy

## EMPLOYMENT BARRIERS: A CLOSER LOOK

The common thread in all of these situations is LEABC. For those who have grown up in the U.S., it may not be obvious that the American work culture is quite different from employment in other cultures and countries. Differences begin even before a candidate is hired. For example:

- U.S. jobs often require that an applicant complete a multiple-choice test. Many immigrants have no experience with this type of testing, nor with the content of popular “personality” tests meant to assess a jobseeker’s honesty and reliability.
- In the U.S., it is common to ask job interviewees to enumerate their weaknesses. This is uncomfortable and confusing for jobseekers who are not accustomed to having to confess negative traits while trying to attain employment.
- The U.S. business dress code can vary greatly by industry. In addition, these codes are both written and *unwritten*, which can be confusing.
- Gestures and salutations differ greatly in different cultures. Immigrant jobseekers must become accustomed to U.S. business norms for eye contact and firm hand shakes.
- Rules and norms around political correctness may differ from those in other countries. Immigrants must learn American rules (formal and informal) regarding appropriate ways to discuss differences between people.
- Commuting to a job is the norm in the U.S., and employers expect jobseekers to be prepared for a 30- to 90-minute trip to work. Immigrant jobseekers may

not be accustomed to traveling such distances to work, and may have to adjust to accommodate the commute time.

Other procedures that are common in the U.S. but not necessarily in other countries include timesheets and “clocking in,” time-off procedures, benefits procedures, and communication around job expectations.

Workforce development agencies with an immigrant focus, such as the Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians, address LEABC in several ways:

- Training on U.S. business and workplace etiquette
- Individual coaching and small-group workshops in interviewing and on-the-job skills
- Mock interviews
- Analysis of workplace situations and recommendations on how to proceed

**Limited English proficiency:** English is the common language of this country. Not only is it necessary for an increasing number of entry-level jobs, but *written* English skills are often required to pass the initial hurdle of a job application. For example, one hotel requires a lengthy online application, including a 16-page, 90-question personality test. Even obtaining a position as a laundry attendant is impossible for candidates who cannot pass the initial written screening, although the job itself provides color-coded tools for low-literacy employees.

Jobs which do *not* require these hurdles are disproportionately likely to be under-the-table jobs that pay in cash rather than via payroll and are generally populated with non-English-speaking colleagues. For a limited English speaker, the benefits of working with native English

speakers is invaluable. In addition to legal compliance, legitimate payroll jobs also offer other benefits to the worker, such as an improved ability to build financial credit.

The effect of limited English proficiency can be mitigated in a variety of ways. Organizations such as the Welcoming Center can focus on placements in fields where the jobseeker is going to be exposed to English-speaking colleagues and customers, or at companies where a supervisor or colleague speaks the jobseeker's primary language. The jobseeker can also be provided with information and encouragement on how they can improve their English, by connecting them with local English classes, advocating with employers for predictable work schedules that will allow time for study, providing tips for at-home practice, etc.

**Lack of American work experience:** Over and over, employers balk at hiring candidates who have zero American work experience. Sometimes this reflects concern about candidates' familiarity with unwritten codes (see LEABC above). It can also reflect an employer's inability to assess a candidate's foreign work experience.

Some employers are worried about liability issues in hiring an employee with no U.S. job history and no locally based job references. Even entry-level jobs often require criminal background checks and child abuse clearances. Sometimes employers require these clearances to cover several years. If a candidate has not lived in the U.S. for at least five years, he or she can often be excluded from even applying for such jobs, because a federal or state background check would be insufficient for a recent arrival.

**Limited transferability of educational credentials:** Some jobseekers have difficulty transferring their home-country educational credentials to the U.S. The usual path is to provide original, sealed copies of a college transcript and diploma to a respected credential evaluation service such as World Education Services, and then receive an official document

### SPOTLIGHT ON IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE



Some women that come to the U.S. from another country are accustomed to a culture that pre-determined their role as a mother, wife and homemaker. As a result, a large number of these women have no formal job experience and limited education. In contrast, the American norm has become a two-income household. Therefore, **some immigrant women find themselves seeking out formal employment for the first time in their lives.** For many, this is an intimidating and confusing process.

A recent survey conducted by New America Media<sup>3</sup> found that the majority of women immigrants found a job within their first year, but the average wage at the first job was only about \$500 per month. Proving that most gateway jobs lead to better opportunities, the majority of the women interviewed in this survey reported that despite working initially for very low wages, the salary of their current job is more than double that of their first, and a significant number reported salaries of \$2000 or more per month. It is important to acknowledge that for most a gateway job was a necessary step for attaining such salaries.

<sup>3</sup> "Women Immigrants: Stewards of the 21st Century Family." New America Media. February 2009. [http://news.newamericamedia.org/news/view\\_article.html?article\\_id=01ab6bae8ae4fa2ac4b9265608901b9e&from=rss](http://news.newamericamedia.org/news/view_article.html?article_id=01ab6bae8ae4fa2ac4b9265608901b9e&from=rss)

summarizing one's educational accomplishments in U.S. terms ("Your degree is equivalent to a four-year Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering from an accredited university.")

However, the process is not always smooth. Jobseekers may find their credential evaluations delayed or denied because of difficulties in obtaining transcripts from their home countries. Some jobseekers have no recourse for attaining these documents. In some cases, war or political turmoil make it literally impossible to obtain records. In other cases, alumni are stymied by bureaucracies that are unable or unwilling to provide records to their graduates.

To make matters worse, an increasing number of entry-level jobs are requiring applicants to provide *paper copies* of high-school diplomas, often an impossible task for a refugee who left his country hurriedly.

**Limited education:** Some jobseekers have extremely limited levels of education from their home countries – perhaps just four or five years of schooling. Because of war, natural disasters, poverty, or gender discrimination, these candidates are far from being able to acquire a high-school diploma or even a GED. Still, their informally-acquired skills in caregiving, food service, retail sales, and cleaning are marketable.

**Family and caregiving responsibilities:** Childcare in the U.S is more expensive than in most other countries, and many immigrants arrive here without a safety net of family or friends who can provide crucial back-up. As a result, many parents of young children are specifically seeking part-time work. They may be available for only four or six hours a day if their children are in pre-school, or if they are solely responsible for drop-off and pick-up.

Placing these jobseekers in a 20-hour-a-week position can be a great success, as they are able to begin acquiring American work experience and earning money while still fulfilling their other responsibilities. It is especially important not to push candidates to adopt over-ambitious schedules, as workers can then lose employment due to a work schedule that simply cannot accommodate their caregiving responsibilities. To be fired from a job because she has arrived late three times is demoralizing for the candidate and leaves a bad impression with the employer, making it even harder for her or other immigrants to return to that job in the future.

### CASE STUDY



#### Ly\*

Arriving from Vietnam with very limited English, Ly spent her first few years concentrating on raising her children and helping them adapt to the U.S. As her children grew up, Ly came to the Welcoming Center seeking a job that would provide extra income to help her household, while allowing for flexibility to meet her family responsibilities. To this end, Ly desired a job close to home. An Employment Specialist from the Welcoming Center identified a major grocery store within walking distance of Ly's home that was seeking part-time employees. Ly has been employed at this grocery store for three years now. Although the job pays a modest wage starting at \$7.50 per hour, with small increases over time, she enjoys the benefits of being a union employee. More importantly, the job brings extra income into her home and provides the flexibility and accessibility she needs.

\* Name has been changed for privacy

Although some of the barriers that work-authorized immigrants face are significant, the overwhelming majority of this population is capable of, and eager to find, legal employment. Given this fact, it makes economic sense to include this population in the workforce development agenda. Placing individuals in gateway jobs is of relatively low cost compared to the costs of those same individuals remaining unemployed or working in the informal economy. Indeed, if this population of new Americans does not obtain that crucial first payroll job in the U.S., the alternatives are far worse: informal work in the cash economy, stagnation and lack of opportunity for advancement, poverty, and potentially dependence on public assistance.

There are numerous reasons to provide job-placement services to new Americans. First, there is a clear match between employers' need to fill jobs and this pool of workers. Even in a recession, entry-level jobs exist and local industries depend upon filling these jobs with good workers. Second, agencies such as the Welcoming Center have built long-standing partnerships with employers, many of whom are eager to hire the candidates that we serve. Moreover, these agencies' key services – screening for marketable skills, contextualized literacy and vocational English training, job skills training, and job placement – greatly increase the probability of successful hires. It costs our economy much less to invest in the services which are needed to connect workers to jobs, than to allow those individuals to remain unemployed.

### CREATING ECONOMIC BENEFITS FOR ALL

Entry-level workers who obtain payroll jobs result in positive outcomes for our City and State. Tax revenues receive a boost when a worker moves from the informal or cash economy into the legitimate one. All Welcoming Center job placements are legal, payroll jobs.

A study conducted by Econsult Corporation from our 2007 data calculated the economic benefit of our work and determined that the Welcoming Center's employment program had a return on investment of \$1.66 for every dollar invested.

*Shared Prosperity: How the Integration of Immigrant Workers Creates Economic Benefits for All Pennsylvanians.* Econsult Corporation, 2009.  
[www.welcomingcenter.org/documents/E-ConReportWeb.pdf](http://www.welcomingcenter.org/documents/E-ConReportWeb.pdf)

# JOB PLACEMENT SERVICES LEAD TO OUTCOMES



Over the years, as nonprofit employment and training organizations have seen an increasing influx of immigrant jobseekers, some agencies have tailored their services to meet the needs of such jobseekers. Some of the services offered to immigrant jobseekers are common to any workforce development program, but there are also a host of specialized services that are needed to meet the specific needs of immigrants.

These nonprofits not only help immigrants to find gainful, legal employment in the U.S., but also provide important support to employers in finding qualified and motivated employees. By reducing employers' human resources costs and improving jobseeker connections to the workforce, nonprofits contribute to a robust local economy. Agencies such as the Welcoming Center build strong relationships with local employers in order to meet their particular employment needs.

The Welcoming Center begins this process by making an in-person visit to all potential employer partners. Once an

employer has been vetted we maintain regular communication with employer partners about job openings. In addition, because of the population that we serve, the Welcoming Center always seeks out partners that may have a need for employees who speak languages other than English. Our Employment Specialists have made many successful matches between employers and employees based on a need for a specific language skill.

#### Services Required to Effectively Place Immigrant Jobseekers:

- Intake and skills assessment
- Training in basic job skills
- Information about career options
- Information about specialized training programs
- Introduction to American business culture
- One-on-one counseling
- Matching clients with employers
- Referrals to other resources such as childcare, ESL, GED, etc.

Workforce development services are vital to ensuring that immigrants are not limited to taking a cash-economy job. “Under the table” jobs do not build a credit history or employment history and are often devoid of opportunities for learning marketable skills, such as English, computer skills, etc. Furthermore, the vast majority of clients who come to the Welcoming Center recognize the benefits of gaining legal employment and are intent on doing so.

Welcoming Center research shows that a full 69% of gateway job placements represent a jobseeker's very first leap to U.S. payroll employment. For 16%, it is their first-ever formal work experience, in any country.<sup>4</sup> For these jobseekers, the Welcoming Center plays a key role in their job search. Our Employment Specialists have significant expertise and knowledge about the needs of employers, allowing them to provide invaluable advice to ensure that a candidate has the best chance for becoming and staying employed.

## CASE STUDY



### Elena\*

Elena arrived from Russia with a Masters in Chemistry, but because her degree was not recognized in the U.S. and she spoke no English, her options for employment were severely limited. A Welcoming Center Employment Specialist was able to match Elena with a job at a home healthcare agency, where she began working as a home health aide at \$7.50 per hour. Although this job was not her end goal, **she gained valuable experience and skills on the job, while studying English in her off hours.** **After six months, Elena was able to enroll in a certified nurse aide training program.** She passed the test and found employment for \$12 per hour at an assisted living community. Her new employer then paid for Elena to attend a nursing program at community college. **Within two years of taking her first gateway job, Elena became a registered nurse and is now earning \$35 per hour plus benefits.**

\* Name has been changed for privacy

<sup>4</sup> Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians, FY '09 job placement data.

It is in the interest of all Americans — native-born and new arrivals alike — that all workers' skills and knowledge are put to their highest and best use. Unemployment and under-employment hurt individual workers and our region as a whole, through lost productivity, wages, and tax revenue.

There is extensive literature on the ways that policymakers can ensure that workers who face special barriers are integrated into the workforce. People who are coming out of prison, people living with mental illness, and immigrant professionals struggling with how to transfer their credentials all require particular services to connect promptly and effectively to jobs.

This report has focused on another small subset of workers: Workers with extremely limited or no work experience, limited English proficiency, and/or limited familiarity with American business culture. In the preceding pages, we have outlined the phenomenon of gateway jobs, the population which benefits from such jobs, and the reasons that gateway jobs benefit workers and the broader society. In this section, we list recommendations for the officials who frame workforce development policy, the business owners who employ such workers, and the nonprofit workforce development organizations that serve them.

**Employers, policymakers and workforce development partners could significantly increase employment rates for new immigrants by making some relatively small adaptations. The following are suggestions for incorporating immigrant needs into workforce development strategy:**

### FOR POLICYMAKERS:

**Include work-authorized immigrants when framing workforce development policy.** There is clear evidence that recent growth in the U.S. population and workforce is due in large measure to immigrants. On a local level, immigrants make up approximately 11% of the total population and 14% of the working-age population in Philadelphia.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, a study conducted by the Brookings Institution found that 75% of the increase in our regional workforce since 2000 is attributable to immigrants.<sup>6</sup> These statistics underscore the importance of incorporating work-authorized immigrants into broader workforce development policies.

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<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 American Community Survey

<sup>6</sup> *Recent Immigration to Philadelphia: Regional Change in a Re-Emerging Gateway*. Audrey Singer, Domenic Vitiello, Michael Katz, David Park. Brookings Institution, November 2009.

**Consider the role of gateway jobs when setting placement requirements.** As this report details, while gateway jobs are not ideal for most workers, they are a critical stepping stone for a small subset of workers. Policymakers should take this role into account when setting thresholds for wages and number of hours worked, and ensure that minimum-wage or part-time placements are recognized.

### FOR EMPLOYERS:

**Take advantage of free services to employers.** Both nonprofit workforce development organizations and the one-stop CareerLink centers provide an array of services to assist business owners in screening and hiring qualified candidates. For example, employers can cut human resources expenses by sharing their job requirements with these agencies, and relying on nonprofit or one-stop staff to prescreen candidates before referring them.

**Recognize elements of the job-screening process that may eliminate qualified candidates.** Hiring managers are often faced with a large volume of candidates, and must rely on broad sorting mechanisms to assess them. Business owners can increase the likelihood of locating loyal, long-term employees by making sure that their initial screening processes do not unnecessarily exclude qualified candidates. For example, requiring a paper copy of a high school diploma may rule out an applicant from a war-torn country who was unable to bring her diploma with her when she fled.

**Consider offering on-the-job employee enrichment.** In a tough economic climate, business owners may be limited in their ability to offer increased wages. However, all employees – whether native-born or new arrivals – are more likely to be retained if lunch-hour or after-shift learning opportunities are offered. Classes could provide language education (in English or in other languages for those who already speak English), safety training, or other job-related skills. Instructors can be employees, nonprofit subcontractors, or graduate student volunteers from a university training program.

### FOR NONPROFIT WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS:

**Gather the data.** Currently, nonprofits collect data in response to the requirements of funders such as the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement or local Workforce Investment Boards. But in the process of collecting this *required* data, nonprofits can also pro-actively identify other information that can be used to illustrate trends. For example, tracking the time-to-placement for jobseekers of different educational backgrounds is not an indicator that is generally required, but it can be useful for both program managers and policy advocacy. New data elements should be added selectively, so that staff and participants are not burdened by the over-collection of data.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Track best practices and evaluate your organization's program model(s).** Staying aware of trends in the field and contributing your own observations is itself a best practice. Nonprofit employment and training programs benefit from learning about what their peers are doing, as well as what third-party evaluators such as MDRC are saying about their program models. In addition, nonprofits which are themselves developing innovative models should publicize their work through conference presentations and reports.

**Use data to inform policymakers and the public.** Once collected, data should be put to productive use. Nonprofits are fortunate to have a treasure trove of local, on-the-ground information that is often far more recent and specific than national or statewide data sets. While it is not practical to analyze or publish all of this data, it is valuable to periodically select a relevant subset to spotlight. Self-publishing an interesting result can jump-start broader discussions in the field.

## CONCLUSION

The recommendations above are ideas for how nonprofits, business owners, and policymakers can contribute to a stronger economy. As the U.S. pulls itself through economic recovery, it is critical that our efforts draw on the talents of *all* workers. Ensuring that work-authorized immigrants are effectively integrated into the labor force is beneficial to native-born and new Americans alike.

The Welcoming Center extends our gratitude to the United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania for supporting the development of this report. Have questions or comments about *Gateway Jobs in Our Economy*? Contact the Welcoming Center at 215-557-2626 or [info@welcomingcenter.org](mailto:info@welcomingcenter.org) and we will be happy to discuss the report and our experience with gateway jobs.



# GATEWAY JOBS

THE VERY FIRST STEP ON THE WORKFORCE LADDER

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Welcoming  
Center *for*  
NEW PENNSYLVANIANS

*Connecting immigrants, employers,  
and communities*