



Gaining Ground and Confidence on the Road to Employment:  
An Evaluation of  
The Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians'  
International Professionals Program



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# INTERNATIONAL PROFESSIONALS PROGRAM (IPP) EVALUATION

## About this Report

This report presents findings from a program evaluation of Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians' International Professionals Program (IPP). Funded by Philadelphia Works Inc., the IPP evaluation was conducted by SCALE Consulting and took place from September 2017 through June 2018. The evaluation included online surveys, focus groups and interviews of 26 participants from three separate IPP cohorts. It also incorporated interview data from phone interviews with three employers who hired IPP graduates. The evaluation was guided by the following goals:

- Assess employment rates among IPP graduates, with a target goal of attaining a 90% employment rate as of six months completion of Phase I of IPP;
- Identify individual factors employers look for when making hiring decisions about IPP graduates; and
- Understand changes in participant perceived confidence, content knowledge, job-seeking skills, and perceived competence throughout the course of IPP.

For more information about the terminology, methods, and tools used in this evaluation, contact the author at [ecassidy@scaleconsulting.net](mailto:ecassidy@scaleconsulting.net).

## About the Author

Elaine F. Cassidy, Ph.D., is the founder and Principal of SCALE Consulting, a research and evaluation firm based in Philadelphia, PA. She has nearly 20 years of experience working in research and evaluation. Cassidy formerly worked as a researcher and instructor in the Graduate School of Education of the University of Pennsylvania and as a Program Officer in Research and Evaluation at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, where she oversaw research and evaluation activities for addiction prevention and treatment, obesity prevention, intimate partner violence prevention, and community violence prevention. She also worked as a Senior Project Manager at Equal Measure, a research and evaluation consulting firm in Philadelphia, PA, where she designed and facilitated thought leader forums and evaluations of various aspects of community health. She holds a B.A. in Psychology and the Program of Liberal Studies (Great Books) from the University of Notre Dame, an M.S.Ed. in Psychological Services from the University of Pennsylvania, and a Ph.D. in School, Community, and Child-Clinical Psychology from the University of Pennsylvania.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Immigrants represent roughly 15% of Philadelphia’s 1.5 million residents.<sup>1</sup> Among these new Philadelphians are highly educated professionals, who experience “brain waste” by being unemployed or underemployed in low-skilled jobs.<sup>2</sup> To address “brain waste” in Philadelphia, the Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians launched in 2014 the International Professionals Program (IPP), an 8-month training course that consists of two phases of instruction. *Phase 1* includes eight weeks of classroom-based and experiential learning to help immigrants master job-seeking steps, while *Phase 2* offers six months of career coaching, during which participants receive introductions to new networking opportunities, guidance about job searches and employment, and, if applicable, feedback about work performance and responsibilities.

**IPP Evaluation Goals**

- Assess employment rates among IPP graduates (Target: 90% employed as of six months Phase I completion);
- Identify individual factors employers look for when making hiring decisions about IPP graduates; and
- Understand changes in participant confidence, knowledge, job-seeking skills, and competence throughout IPP.

This report presents findings from a program evaluation of IPP that took place from September 2017 through June 2018. The evaluation included findings from online surveys, focus groups and interviews of 26 participants from three IPP cohorts. It also incorporated phone interview data from three employers who hired IPP graduates.

## KEY FINDINGS



Employment rates for the three IPP cohorts suggest that the Welcoming Center is nearly on pace to meet its goal of 90% employment as of six months completion of Phase I, especially given that employment rates are expected to rise over time as participants enter Phase II and receive mentorship tailored to match unemployed graduates with suitable jobs.

### Employer Perceptions of IPP Hires

Employers who hired IPP “graduates” (participants who completed Phase I) within the past six months described how graduates possessed important qualities they look for in new hires, including strong communication and interpersonal skills, adaptability, and professionalism.

<sup>1</sup> Pew Charitable Trusts. (June 2018). Philadelphia immigrants: Who they are and how they’re changing the city. [www.pewtrusts.org](http://www.pewtrusts.org). Note: 2016 Census data were most recent data available for analyses.  
<sup>2</sup> Soto, A.G.R., Batalova, J., and Fix, M. (2016). The costs of brain waste among highly skilled immigrants in select states. Migration Policy Institute. [www.migrationpolicy.org](http://www.migrationpolicy.org)  
<sup>3</sup> After participant completion of IPP Phase I.

Employers also shared the following positive impressions of IPP graduates:

- ***IPP graduates were strong communicators who were well-prepared for job interviews.*** They submitted polished, well-written résumés and cover letters and answered interview questions with clear, well-rehearsed responses.
- ***They presented themselves as adaptable, capable of speaking different languages and handling numerous tasks at once.*** Graduates' multilingual skills were great assets in filling positions involving contact with non-English speaking clients. The poise, confidence, and professionalism they exhibited during job interviews assured employers that the IPP grads could manage multiple tasks at once in their new positions.
- ***They provided personalized professional references.*** The references IPP graduates provided stood out among those typically received from job candidates because they helped employers get a clear sense of who graduates are and what they have to offer.
- ***They should promote unique benefits of the immigrant experience to future employers.*** Immigrants are encouraged to share personal stories about their immigrant experiences moving forward so employers understand candidates' history and strengths.

## Changes in Perceived Confidence

***Increased confidence was the most noteworthy and rewarding benefit participants received from IPP.*** By the end of Phase I, all IPP graduates felt significantly more confident, especially with their interpersonal skills. They particularly gained confidence to interact in English with potential employers during interviews and networking events.

For some IPP participants, this newfound confidence sparked hope to start their job searches again, after losing hope that a new job would come their way.

## Changes in Knowledge, Job-seeking Skills, and Perceived Competence

Before and after IPP Phase I, participants rated their overall understanding of U.S. work culture and described aspects of U.S. work culture they knew well. In addition, they rated their understanding of what is required to succeed in the U.S. workplace and described what they understood about success in the U.S. workplace. After Phase I, participants also acquired knowledge of important job-seeking skills. As they learned more about what American employers expect, they felt more competent that “I can” do what is needed to obtain a job. Participants reported that the practice and feedback they experienced throughout Phase I helped strengthen their interpersonal skills, which helped them build professional and personal networks and engage in direct social interaction.



IPP participants during a networking event.

*IPP graduates acquired knowledge of U.S. work culture, success and job-seeking skills, and they developed the belief that “I can” use those skills to find a job.*

**Participants Gained Knowledge About:**

- U.S. work culture and success
- Using internet/social media to find opportunities
- Finding opportunities that fit
- Searching and applying for jobs
- Writing résumés, cover letters
- Interviewing for jobs

**They Felt More Competent:**

- Communicating strengths
- Networking
- Identifying useful websites for job searches
- Writing résumés, cover letters
- Dressing professionally

*They developed stronger interpersonal skills, which helped them build professional and personal networks.* They sharpened abilities to read body language, provide eye contact, and speak clearly in English and used these skills to network with professionals in target areas and build personal connections, especially within the immigrant community.

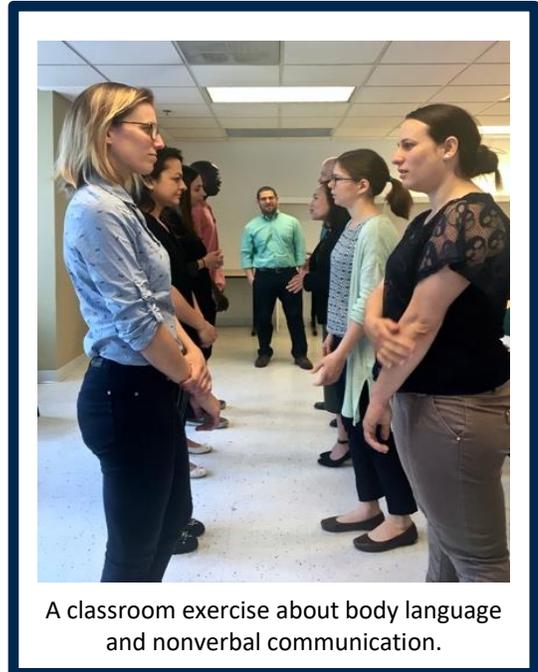
*They refined their direct social interaction skills, including behaviors that run counter to cultural norms.* They reported that feedback and practice they received in IPP helped them feel more competent with their English and direct social interaction skills, such as networking, interviewing, and talking about strengths. Practice and feedback especially helped participants who began IPP feeling uncomfortable with direct social interaction.

## PROMISING INDICATORS OF SUCCESS FOR IMMIGRANT PROFESSIONALS TO OBTAIN EMPLOYMENT

Several individual-level factors emerged from these findings that are considered promising indicators of success for immigrant professionals to obtain employment. Indicators include:

- **Confidence.** Confidence can help immigrants feel ready – even hopeful -- to find opportunities and professionally interact with future employers.
- **Belief that “I can” find a job.** Immigrants who embrace the belief that “I can” find the right opportunities and successfully perform job-seeking tasks seem poised to appear competent and confident to those who make hiring decisions.
- **Adaptability.** Immigrants looking for new jobs are encouraged to promote examples of adaptability – in handling different languages, tasks, or social situations, to name a few -- because employers described this trait as an important asset to their organizations.
- **Strong communication skills, especially those involving direct social interaction.** Employers expect employees to speak clearly in English and interact directly, using eye contact, handshakes, and concise language. Immigrant professionals are encouraged to practice English and direct social interaction to master these skills.

- ***Interpersonal networks that offer professional opportunity and personal support.*** Professional networks can help immigrants learn about new fields and access job opportunities. Personal networks, especially those that include other immigrants, can offer emotional support during a challenging time in one's life.
- ***Knowledge of U.S. work culture, success, and job-seeking skills.*** Immigrant professionals need to understand U.S. work culture and success to know what employers expect from employees. They also need practical knowledge of job-seeking skills so they can find the right opportunities and successfully navigate the job-search process.
- ***Personalized references.*** References that offer personal details about immigrants' unique experiences and strengths particularly help them stand out among other job candidates.
- ***Well-versed interview skills.*** Immigrant professionals who have abilities to field different interview questions and highlight their education backgrounds, experiences, and personal and professional strengths stand out among other candidates and improve their chances to obtain jobs successfully.



A classroom exercise about body language and nonverbal communication.

## CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS TO INFORM IMMIGRANT PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION FIELD

Initial findings highlight numerous benefits for immigrant professionals who completed IPP, but more work is needed to support and expand immigrant employment training programs like IPP and contribute to the pool of research on immigrant professional integration. Organizations and funders have particular potential to advance this field.

### Recommendations for Organizations:

- ***Take active roles in helping immigrant professionals learn about opportunities and refine their networking and interview skills.*** Organizational leaders are encouraged to attend mock interviews and networking events arranged by training programs like IPP so they can help immigrants practice interpersonal skills and receive real-time feedback. Leaders also might initiate career panels for new immigrants so professionals can learn about different fields and understand what organizations have to offer.
- ***Incentivize employee volunteerism in programs or events that help immigrant professionals.*** Organizations are encouraged to provide professional or monetary incentives for employees to volunteer time to attend job fairs, speak in career panels, or serve as instructors or mentors in immigrant employment training programs.

## **Recommendations for Funders:**

- *Support and expand intensive training models that provide instruction and hands-on experiential learning for immigrant professionals.* Funds are needed to support immigrant training models like IPP so those programs can increase access to larger numbers of immigrant professionals and expand offerings by incorporating a larger number of volunteers, who can inform immigrants about new fields and opportunities.
- *Fund more research and evaluation in the immigrant professional integration field.* Funding is encouraged to support additional evaluations that verify and expand upon the emergent findings from this program evaluation and incorporate larger samples of foreign-educated professionals and employers.

As a leading program in training highly educated foreign-born professionals, Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians' International Professionals Program (IPP) has potential to reduce brain waste and connect large numbers of immigrant professionals to gainful employment. With support from organizations and funders, the Welcoming Center will continue to further refine IPP and contribute to the emergent pool of research in the immigrant professional integration field.