

LANGUAGE LEARNER & WORKFORCE CONVENING SUMMARY
SACRAMENTO, CA
JULY 21, 2016

On Thursday, July 21st nearly 100 workforce, adult education, community college, local board, one stop providers, community organizations, and social service partners came together to discuss how in collaboration with State Government partners we can better serve English language learners and immigrants in the workforce system.

The event was opened by California Workforce Development Board Executive Director Tim Rainey and Robin Purdy, Chief Deputy Director who welcomed participants – acknowledging their role in helping to shape the policies and work of the board in better serving immigrants and English language learners. This effort is part of the broader work of the Labor Agency around immigrant integration. Dan Torres, the Director of Immigrant Integration in Governor Brown’s Office was also in attendance.

Labor and Workforce Development Agency Secretary David Lanier addressed the crowd, thanking everyone for the work they do, and reminding us of the many steps this administration has taken to help all Californian’s have upward economic mobility. Secretary Lanier recognized the contributions of immigrants and expressed the commitment of the agency to better serve immigrants and English language workers.

The rest of the morning was filled with presentations from experts on Immigrants & Workforce, followed by highlights on promising practices from the field. Margie McHugh from the Migration Policy Institute kicked off her presentation by noting that immigrants make up more than 1/3 of California’s workforce. Tracking how many immigrants are served in the workforce system is a challenge because race and ethnicity indicators are not a proxy—and the system doesn’t capture foreign/native born. A good proxy for measuring success however has been considering the number of Limited English Proficient (LEP) served. In PY 2014, only 3.7% of exiters from Title I adult and intensive training services were LEP. With low-educated and LEP individuals part of the new, automatic Priority of Service under WIOA, McHugh noted the importance of also cross-tabulating adults’ LEP status with lack of a high school diploma. When looking at these data she noted that 62% (3.1 million) of the state’s low-educated adults are also LEP, and that only 300 of those exiting California’s adult and intensive programs in 2014 had both traits. She pointed out that California’s training access figures under WIA were so low in part because programs often had pre-requisites for individuals to possess a high school diploma and be English proficient. Now, however, under WIOA, these basic skills deficient individuals are a priority for service, at the same time that the federal DOL has strengthened its guidance regarding access to training services for LEP individuals. McHugh proposed key policy opportunities for improving immigrants’ and English learners’ access to training services including setting an equity “floor” for the inclusion of low-educated and LEP individuals; providing Technical Assistance for equity improvements; and ensuring advocacy and involvement in the federal regression analysis that is currently in development by US DOL.

Amanda Bergson-Shilcock from the National Skills Coalition prefaced her presentation with a reminder that the policy decisions impact real people and their families—and that as we have these conversations we remain grounded on those that the system is intended to serve and what these decisions mean for them. Amanda presented several best practices from across the country that target immigrants and refugees with limited English, Deferred Action for Early Childhood Arrival (DACA) recipients, refugees

with foreign degrees, immigrants with basic skills gaps, and incumbent workers. The key takeaway was that with the right funding sources (examples included both public and private funding and philanthropic investments) and appropriate service providers and partners, that these investments can go a long way in transforming the lives of those that the programs serve. These best practices when adapted for local conditions and needs can be further enhanced and likely taken to scale. Amanda left us with some key policy considerations, including: exploring how we fully leverage SNAP Employment & Training Resources; how we take advantage at the occupational licensure changes in California which now allow undocumented people to obtain professional/occupational licenses under SB 1159; and further exploring how career pathways could better include and serve immigrants.

The first of the promising practice presenters was Glenn Scott Davis, Policy Specialist with the City of Seattle's Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (OIRA) in Seattle, Washington. OIRA is charged with overseeing and monitoring the Ready to Work Program and partnership. The City of Seattle recognized that it had a problem building equitable pathways to careers and economic stability; there was a need to improve and expand educational and training opportunities; and there was a need to increase access and participation to community based social services for immigrants and refugees in Seattle. This culminated in the launch of Ready to Work—which would specifically serve those with low levels of English proficiency and need for stable employment. The intent was not to compete with existing programs but to demonstrate a model that could later be scaled and institutionalized, while “moving the needle” on performance outcomes and impact. The program's funding sources included leveraging of city funds, Community Development Block Grant (CBDG), WA State Adult Education through the Seattle Colleges, and WIOA funds through the local Workforce Development Council. Additional design elements of the program include housing the program in a community based organization; provision of intensive case management; pro-active career and job development individualized plans that include exposure to workshops and field trips that complement classes. While only a year into its program, Ready to Work is undergoing a third party evaluation to be released this summer. During its first year of pilot operation, RTW posted ninety-nine (99) enrollments and has averaged 83% quarterly course attendance and 84% completion rates. Of its seventy-six (76) individual participants, nineteen (19) were placed in jobs with another nineteen (19) advancing to enrollment in a higher ESL level college campus class and each quarter 45% of completing students advance to the next Quarter RTW class.

Ready to Work offered some policy considerations including: funding community based models of adult education; development and funding of short-term sector focused training that can serve as “on-ramps” to targeted working class jobs; leverage/blend funding resources as much as possible; and consideration of workforce initiatives to improve job quality and training in targeted low wage working class sectors.

The second promising practice was presented by Sue Gilmore, Director of Adult Education at the Sacramento City Unified School District, and Connie Lee, Director of the Capital Adult Education Regional Consortium (CAERC). Sue and Connie discussed how their consortium is structured, how they engage their partners, including community organizations and the process they undertook to identify their regional priorities which include: building and expanding education offerings; developing alignment and pathways; increasing student support services; and enhancing data and accountability systems. They highlighted the level of collaboration that takes place in their organization, and their mantra of leave no one behind. Two additional highlights covered by Sue and Connie included a preview of their web portal that will have an inventory of all their Adult Ed programs and services at your fingertips online on a searchable database that provides locations nearest you; and they also highlighted a Special Projects Request for Proposal (RFP) recently released, understanding that there may be community partners who can better help them address the needs of underserved adult populations in the region.

The afternoon session commenced with breakouts in four subject areas:

- How to incentivize innovations to serve English Language Learners and Immigrants
- Improving participation and ensuring success for English Language Learners and Immigrants in the workforce
- Providing a support system to improve the pipeline for English Language Learners and Immigrants in the larger workforce system
- Exploring the possibility of a Workforce Navigators program, modelled after the health care navigators and promotoras models.

We will compile notes from the breakout conversations, and make them available along with an in depth report on the days event. The final closing included remarks from Dan Torres, Director of Immigrant Integration in Governor Brown's office and Tim Rainey of the California Workforce Development Board. Dan Torres highlighted how the work that this group is doing will help inform the strategies used by the workforce system, and more importantly can shed light on practices that can be used by other departments and agencies that participate in the Governor's Taskforce on Immigrant Integration. Tim Rainey commented on the board's commitment to continue this conversation, and desire to look for opportunities to help support this work financially, although details are not yet available. Next steps will include producing a report to share with convening participants and other workforce system partners; and exploring other ways to keep participants engaged including possibilities for webinars, and establishing or joining an existing community of practice for practitioners working to serve immigrants and English language learners.

Overall it was a successful event, and we look forward to continuing the conversation on how to better serve English Language Learners and Immigrants in the workforce.