



IDEAS THAT INNOVATE

# State & Local Policies

Using Federal Workforce Funds to Connect Immigrants to Employers with Unmet Talent Needs





# Using Federal Workforce Funds to Connect Immigrants to Employers with Unmet Talent Needs

## Policy

Workforce development funding for immigrants and refugees.

## Where it's working

- State of Idaho

## Players

- Jannus, Inc.
- Idaho Office for Refugees
- Idaho Department of Labor

## What does it mean?

Hiring the best and the brightest candidates is a growing national challenge. In many cases, difficult-to-fill positions remain vacant, hurting a company's bottom line and constraining economic growth in the U.S. In some states like Idaho, Nebraska and Iowa, although unemployment is below 4%, employer talent needs do not match the skills of available workers.

Idaho's State Commerce Director Jeff Sayer has stated that when talking to businesses, "The single biggest limiting factor in their ability to grow is they need skilled talent." To address that need, the State is focused on "creating those talent pipelines that Idaho industries need . . . [and] fixing that gap" by establishing workforce development programs that address specific local industry needs.

While employers and economic development agencies were looking for skilled talent, refugee resettlement groups were looking to address the "brain waste" that exists within refugee communities. "Brain waste" has been defined as unemployment or underemployment in jobs significantly below the education and skill levels of immigrants and refugees. Founded in 2009, Neighbors United—a collaborative initiative which helps refugees successfully integrate and thrive in Boise—developed a strategic plan that, among other things, sought to address "brain waste."

Taking the lead on the "brain waste" issue was the Neighbors United Employment Committee, which in 2014 established Global Talent Idaho, a new workforce development initiative enabling skilled refugees and immigrants to successfully integrate into professional roles in Idaho. Global Talent Idaho is a program of the Idaho Office for Refugees, a nonprofit organization, and part of Jannus, Inc., a local nonprofit and health and human services organization.

In 2015, Global Talent Idaho was awarded a federal technical assistance grant as part of the Networks for Integrating New Americans (NINA) initiative from the U.S. Department of

Education to help them better develop a regional integration systems and connect them with experts in the field, including Upwardly Global. The NINA program served as an early initiative for President Obama's efforts to create national integration policies and programs for New Americans.

Through the NINA program, Global Talent Idaho learned from the U.S. Department of Labor about changes in the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) specifically related to the definition of "dislocated worker." The U.S. Department of Labor has clarified that a foreign-trained worker who has faced barriers to obtaining employment in their trained field or profession may be considered a dislocated worker if the individual meets eligibility criteria, regardless of the location of the employment and layoff. This can include refugees who have been displaced from their home country to the U.S.

These changes to WIOA have allowed Global Talent Idaho to use federal funds to address "brain waste" by providing on-line and in person multi-cultural and English as a Second Language services, one-on-one coaching, credential evaluations, skill building and paid internships. Working with the Idaho Department of Labor, Global Talent Idaho was able to use a small portion (\$300,000 of a two-year \$3 million grant) of a federal job-driven national emergency grant to help address "brain waste" and serve eligible immigrants and refugees. As of August 2016, Global Talent Idaho placed 33 job seekers back into skilled positions and, in partnership with the Idaho Department of Labor, facilitated 25 internships. Global Talent Idaho job seekers placed in full-time positions in their professional field/industry saw average incomes increase by \$27,588, resulting in millions of dollars of positive economic impact to Idaho. Global Talent Idaho currently has 70 job seekers in the program, with nearly 50 who have completed training and were at different stages of their job search as of August 2016.

The program has enabled Global Talent Idaho to serve a diverse array of immigrants and refugees, including helping a chemist return to the lab at the Idaho Bureau of Laboratories and an IT

professional reclaim his career in IT at St. Luke's Hospital's Data Center. Global Talent Idaho has placed foreign-trained professionals in key positions that face talent shortfalls, including addressing shortages of trained teachers and medical doctors in clinical and research positions. This has greatly enhanced the effectiveness of the teachers and medical staff to serve more diverse populations and bring new and innovative perspectives to the workforce.

## Why does it matter?

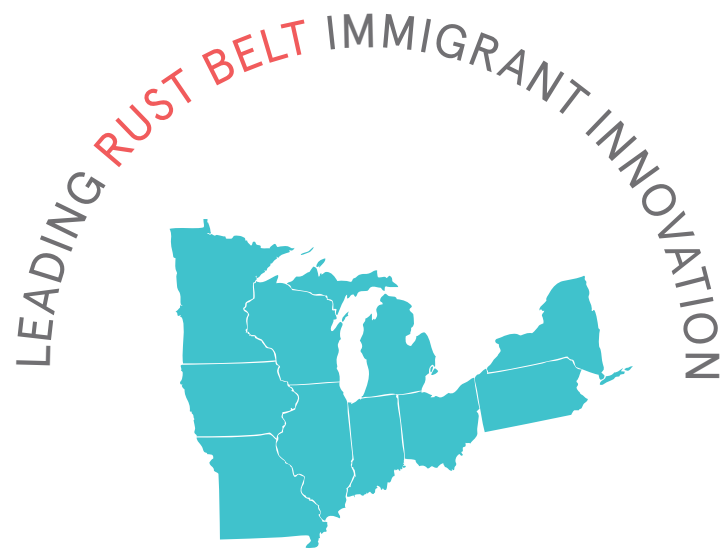
Most regional economies, like Idaho, face tremendous skilled labor shortages. At the same time, 1.6 million foreign-born Americans (or 23% of the 7.2 million college-educated immigrants aged 25 and older) are impacted by "brain waste," meaning that they are unemployed, underemployed or working in jobs significantly below their educational and skill levels. Identifying funding for programs to serve these individuals can be challenging. The changes in federal workforce development and education under WIOA provide new opportunities to address this problem.

By preparing immigrants and refugees to meet the unmet talent needs of local employers, programs like Global Talent Idaho are addressing these needs and helping to grow their regional economies.

## Resources for Action

Migration Policy Institute, "**Federal WIOA Plan Requirements Ignore Opportunities to Support Equitable Access for Immigrant/LEP Adults**" - The Migration Policy Institute breaks down the elements local workforce development programs and immigrant and refugee service providers need to consider in developing WIOA plans that address the needs of immigrants and refugees. [www.migrationpolicy.org/news/federal-wioa-plan-requirements-ignore-opportunities-support-equitable-access-immigrantlep](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/news/federal-wioa-plan-requirements-ignore-opportunities-support-equitable-access-immigrantlep) ↗

Migration Policy Institute, "**Immigrants and WIOA Services: Comparison of Sociodemographic Characteristics of Native- and Foreign-Born Adults in the United States**" - MPI provides state-specific analysis of relevant populations and a helpful breakdown of how this impacts WIOA plans and proposals. [www.migrationpolicy.org/research/immigrants-and-wioa-services-comparison-sociodemographic-characteristics-native-and-foreign](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/immigrants-and-wioa-services-comparison-sociodemographic-characteristics-native-and-foreign) ↗



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