

UPSKILLING NEW AMERICANS: INNOVATIVE ENGLISH TRAINING FOR CAREER ADVANCEMENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Immigration Forum works to ensure our nation thrives by providing innovative programming and advocating for policy change and to help new Americans gain the opportunities, skills and status they need to realize their full potential. Learning English remains an important tool for immigrants to integrate into the US workforce and our society, and contribute fully to the nation.

This report analyzes the design, implementation and growth of **Skills and Opportunity for the New American Workforce**, an industry-contextualized English language training program that offers a bridge between workers seeking to boost English proficiency and employers seeking to enhance workers' skills and retain and promote a diverse workforce. This project is a first-of-its-kind initiative, led by the National Immigration Forum, launched with generous support from the Walmart Foundation. A blended course comprising 40% face-to-face instruction and 60% online learning, this worksite offering has proved to be a highly effective solution for limited-English-proficient workers across various industries looking to build workplace skills and open career pathways.

The goal of this report is to share lessons learned and promising practices identified during various phases of the project with the broader workforce development, immigration and adult education fields. We examined employer engagement, curriculum design, instruction delivery, technology tool development and program evaluation to gain insights from key strategic areas, including:

- **Enlisting key experts and innovators as project partners;**
- **Expanding our curriculum portfolio to new industry contexts and instruction models;**
- **Refining our technology capabilities; and**
- **Developing a financial model that ensures growth and sustainability.**

Through our engagement with innovative companies, we have leveraged their thought leadership and strategic talent development to achieve the following important results and learn several key lessons:



MEET JULIA...

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Great classes and great teacher — it was a wonderful English class! Before, I was very shy when customers talked to me and I put down my head and never answered... Now I feel more comfortable with conversation!

— Julia Caceres
Deli Clerk

We proved our hypothesis that English learning is critical for unlocking career pathway potential. The sector-contextualized English curriculum, highly customized for each employer and delivered by leading accredited community colleges, provides a strong foundation for increased participation in workplace training, builds digital and soft skills, and encourages continuing education. These all serve as a catalyst for unlocking career pathways and increasing economic mobility of foreign-born workers, while ensuring companies solve for operational concerns and build an increasing pool of candidates for internal promotion.

We developed innovative tools to increase employees' access to career advancement opportunities and to aid company operations. These tools allow for building up employees' skills, retention and promotion, and thus business competitiveness. Joined by experts in ESL instruction, curriculum development and education technology, we created highly adaptable instruction models and mobile-optimized technology that prove to increase employees' access to learning, boost their technology skills and accelerate career growth.

We created a solution for scale to meet the needs of the largest workforces and help close the nation's middle-skills gap. To scale the number of employers and employees engaged meant creating a fully remote instruction model and building a self-managed Learning Management System on an open-source platform to allow us to provide anywhere, anytime instruction while enabling us to lower costs and provide competitive pricing for our product. It also meant expanding our network of instruction partners and diversifying our funding model to include employer investment based on proven ROI, new philanthropic investment and in the long-term, partnering with social finance, workforce boards or state adult education programs.



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