

**The Re-credentialing of Skilled Immigrants in the United States:
Barriers and Pathways to the Workforce and Frameworks for
Success**

By Sara Kuehlhorn Friedman

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Partners:

Oregon Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs

Partners in Diversity

Oregon Workforce and Talent Development Board

Governor's Office

Department of Applied Linguistics at Portland State University

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Executive Summary

The present report is the culminating product of a joint public policy research internship exploring the barriers skilled immigrants face when seeking re-credentialing and when attempting to connect to the workforce in the U.S.¹ The problem is this: quite often, skilled immigrants are unable to achieve employment in their field of training and experience due to English language proficiency challenges, the complexity of licensing requirements in their state of residence, credentialing requirements outlined by a national board that represents their field, unconscious bias on the part of employers, or a combination of these challenges. As a result, many skilled immigrants are underemployed.

Underemployment costs society economically and socially. For one, underemployment limits tax revenue to the federal, state, and local governments, resulting in real economic losses when skills go unused. Conservative estimates of U.S. federal annual tax dollars forgone due to the underemployment of skilled immigrants exceeds \$10 billion, while Oregon state misses more than \$27 million annually.² Furthermore, underemployment limits a family's spending power, which effects full participation in the local economy. Oregon's estimated loss in terms of spending power foregone due to underemployment of skilled immigrants exceeds \$272 million.³

Underemployment and the lack of financial stability brought on by underemployment can lead to depression and loss of self-worth,⁴ and children of underemployed individuals miss the opportunities offered by enrichment activities and other investments in their education that have positive effects on their academic and professional achievement later in life. English language proficiency is also tied to underemployment and an individual's likeliness to actively engage in civil society.⁵

In addressing the current disconnect between the professional skills of skilled immigrants and the work they are able to obtain in the U.S., this report analyses the pathways and processes available to skilled immigrants wishing to enter the U.S. workforce. This report takes the position that the economic gains to be won by making the process of the re-credentialing of skilled immigrants in Oregon more efficient and effective are significant and worthwhile, yet the value of increasing social equity for skilled immigrants is greater. Most growth in the U.S. labor

¹ This work was spearheaded by the Oregon Advocacy Commissions Office (OACO) and supported by non-profit and government partners including the Oregon Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs (OCAPIA), Partners in Diversity (PID), the Oregon Workforce and Talent Development Board (WTDB), the Governor's Offices of Equity and Workforce, and the Department of Applied Linguistics at Portland State University.

² Soto, A.R., Batalova, J., & Fix, M. (2017). *The Costs of Brain Waste among Highly Skilled Immigrants in Oregon*. Migration Policy Institute.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Dooley, D., Prause, J., & Ham-Rowbottom, K. (2000). *Underemployment and depression: Longitudinal relationships*. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 41(4), pp. 421-436.

⁵ Batalova, J. and Fix, M. (2010). A profile of limited English proficient adult immigrants. *Peabody Journal of Education* 85(4), pp. 511-534.

force over the next 40 years is projected to come from immigrants and their children.⁶ With this being the case, it is imperative to provide access for entrants to the workforce today so that they can better support the education and development of their children, thus ensuring the strength of tomorrow's workforce.

Findings of this research

- State licensing boards outline re-credentialing requirements.
- The TOEFL is the most common English language proficiency test taken by seekers of re-credentialing in the U.S. and shifting to an alternate model for language proficiency is unlikely in the short term.
- State governments have acted to facilitate employment through executive order and legislation. Clear measures for success for programs created are uncommon.
- In Canada, the *Pan-Canadian Framework for Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications* serves as a unified guide from the federal level which is not present in the U.S.

Recommendations

- 1) Policy Recommendations: Systematic and thoughtful restructuring of English language proficiency, including examination of TOEFL requirements for proficiency from the licensing boards potentially through the creation of an Office of New Americans.
- 2) Coalition building and partnerships between and among state licensing boards and non-profit organizations serving skilled immigrants.
- 3) Further research regarding the needs and barriers specific to Oregon skilled immigrants.

The following report details my findings and recommendations. My thanks to the Oregon Advocacy Commissions Office for the opportunity to complete this work. A special thanks to Professor Keith Walters, who initially connected me to this important work. The topic has truly enveloped my passions for serving the public, facilitating equity, and creating shared understanding.

Sara Kuehlhorn Friedman
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⁶ Wilson, J.H. (2014). *Investing in English Skills: The Limited English Proficient Workforce in U.S. Metropolitan Areas*. Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings.

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Introduction

The re-credentialing process is complex; it requires understanding English language proficiency requirements, an awareness of institutional structures like licensing boards and their authority in qualifying individuals for the workforce, and the importance of networking for work experience. This report aims to describe where access to the process breaks down for many immigrants seeking entry to the workforce in their field as well as to highlight the efforts that some states and local jurisdictions in the U.S. have made to simplify access to the re-credentialing process. Recommendations are outlined at the end of each section and are intended to serve as action points for easing barriers and to provide springboards to future research.

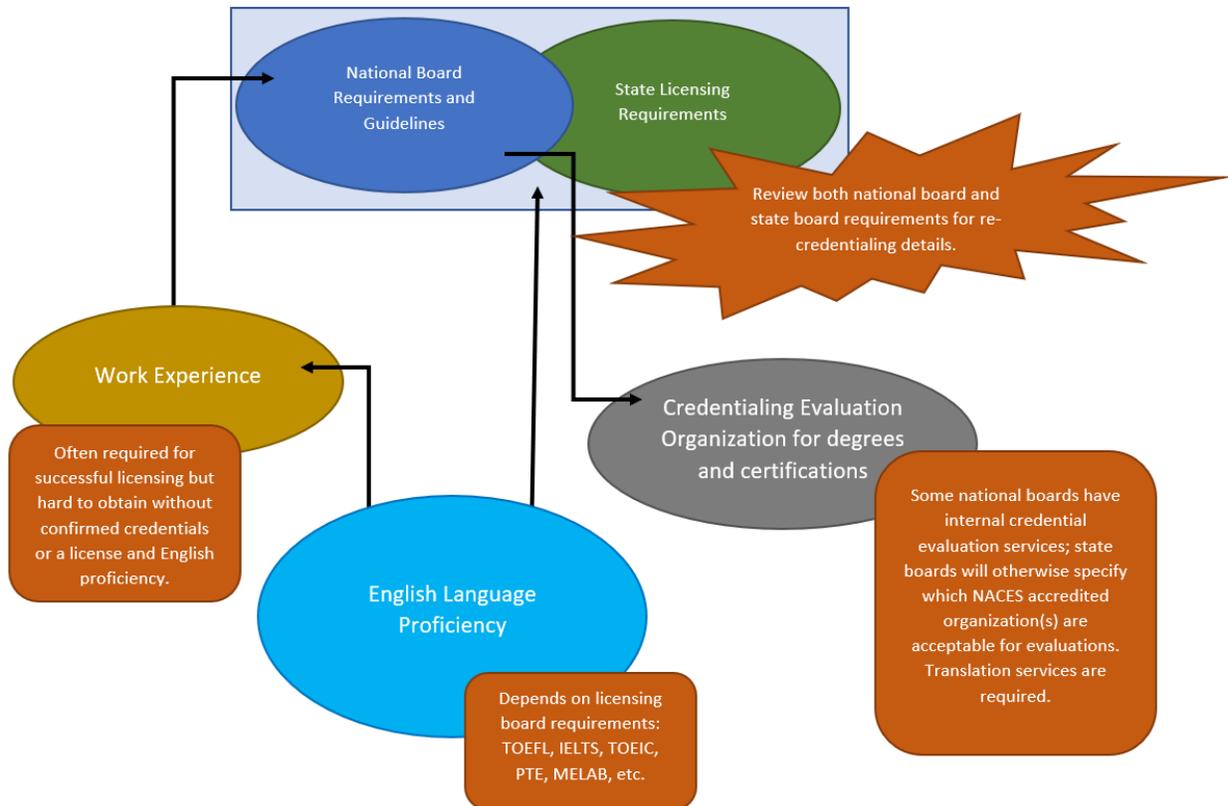
The path to re-credentialing is described in section I and followed by an explanation of three major barriers of the re-credentialing process in section II. U.S. national best practices for facilitating the re-credentialing of skilled immigrants are outlined in section III and section IV compares Canada's processes and pathways for re-credentialing to those observed in the U.S.

I The Re-Credentialing Process

The path to recredentialing for skilled immigrants is complex and dependent on an individual's field of work and state of residence. Figure 1 illustrates the complexity of the re-credentialing process in terms of the minimal number of agents one must come in contact with. The re-credentialing process may include some or all of the elements depicted in the figure. First and foremost, recredentialing requirements are defined by state licensing boards and, where they exist, national boards. While work experience, English language proficiency, and credential evaluations may be requirements for licensure, these aspects of the process may also act as barriers to each other, thus compounding the challenge of accessing the workforce.

It should be noted that the initial process of *finding* information related to the requirements for licensing can be difficult for skilled immigrants and those trying to help them. Information storage and dissemination is a cultural construct and seeking it out can be an unclear and seemingly illogical process. The research for this report illustrated that detailed information relating to re-credentialing is rarely consolidated in one place. Instead, one needs to first know what they are looking for and then take the time to look for individual pieces of information.

Figure 1. Aspects of the Pathway to the Workforce for Skilled Immigrants in the U.S.



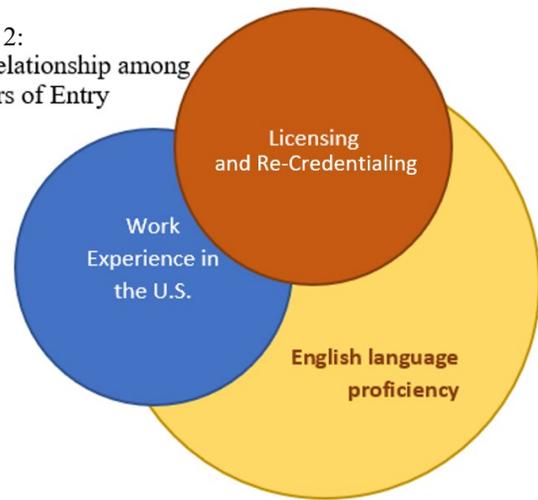
II Three Barriers to Entry

Navigating the U.S. workforce can be difficult for any individual seeking employment, but it is particularly challenging for individuals without credentials or experience in the U.S. job market.

The three major barriers to workforce entry that skilled immigrants face are (1) licensing and re-credentialing in their field, (2) gaining relevant work experience in the U.S., and (3) English language proficiency. These barriers are not mutually exclusive. Most licensing boards include in-country work experience for licensure and gaining work experience without confirmation of licensing can be extremely challenging. The problem for skilled immigrants, then, is negotiating entry into their given field without either one of these two keys to entry. English language proficiency can act as a barrier to either licensing or gaining work experience or both. In fact, English language proficiency can serve as a barrier at any step of the process of U.S. workforce entry, so it is depicted in Figure 2 as the largest of the three barriers. The difference in size in Figure 2 should not, however, suggest that any barrier is more or less significant than the others in terms of its impact on preventing successful entry to the workforce.

As a barrier to entry, work experience is most frequently explained as a result of unconscious bias on the part of institutionalized hiring practices and employers. It is closely related to other barriers of entry but is more directly socially constructed, whereas the complexity of other barriers involves processes and standards institutionalized over time. Because access to U.S. work experience was not the original focus of this research, I do not

Figure 2:
The Relationship among
Barriers of Entry



discuss it in depth here. However, the role of personal bias in gaining relevant skilled work experience arose in anecdotal evidence (R. Salonen, personal communication, May 24, 2018) and in the literature⁷ and should be explored further. In the follow sections, the process of obtaining credential evaluations and English language proficiency are discussed in greater depth.

Barriers to Entry—Re-Credentialing Evaluations:

Immigrants who enter the U.S. with degrees or certifications earned at institutions outside of the U.S. must have those credentials evaluated by an accredited credential evaluation organization in order to be valid in the U.S. The evaluation process can be costly and time consuming, and it is particularly difficult for individuals who are no longer in contact with their degree-granting institution.⁸

A credential evaluation organization reviews foreign-earned degrees, transcripts, and other official documents for a fee and provides clients with an equivalency report in English that translates the value of an individual's foreign-earned education into U.S. standards of coursework. Credential evaluation organizations are primarily accredited by the National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES).⁹ Some credential evaluation services also evaluate work experience, although this is uncommon and may not carry weight with employers or professional licensing boards. Once completed, a credential evaluation can be submitted to licensing boards, potential employers, and other training programs to show competency in a given field. However, an individual may not simply choose one of the many

⁷ Rabben, L. (2013). *Credential Recognition in the United States for Foreign Professionals*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.

⁸ Skilled immigrants who leave their home country because of war or political upheaval have found credentialing requirements such as seeking original documents or the signature of a program supervisor difficult and, at times, impossible due to the context they left behind.

⁹ ICE is another credential evaluation accreditation organization, but their work is primarily directed toward university matriculation rather than workforce development.

NACES accredited credential evaluation organizations. Each licensing board, university, and professional organization lists the few organizations from whom evaluations are acceptable, and evaluations received from other organizations will not be accepted as valid. This requires research and awareness on the part of the skilled immigrant seeking services and adds another murky layer to the process of connecting to the U.S. skilled workforce.

In general, professions requiring a license also require re-credentialing. Re-credentialing is needed to acknowledge any tertiary level education earned from an institution not recognized specifically as a reciprocal institution (reciprocity varies by vocation and governing body). In an effort to develop an inventory of national and state credentialing organizations and determine how standards are set, I researched the hierarchy of organizations relating to credentialing.

Where a national board exists, re-credentialing requirements are often outlined by the national board and mirrored in state licensure requirements. Where a national board does not exist or does not mandate national requirements, state licensing boards may outline requirements for re-credentialing. However, there are also cases in which state licensing requirements do not explicitly state requirements for individuals with foreign credentials and in these cases, it is difficult to know what steps one should take.

Substantial literature exploring the re-credentialing of physicians, nurses and other health care professionals, and engineers illustrates the barriers skilled immigrants face in these fields. There is little literature discussing credential evaluations of skilled immigrants in the trades, ostensibly because apprenticeships and work experience are more difficult to interpret between countries.

In the U.S., the credentialing of foreign educated medical doctors is governed by the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG). Requirements for re-

credentialing as a physician are costly and time consuming, but well-documented. After submitting original documentation of medical degrees earned, the ECFMG requires individuals to pass a clinical skills test, the TOEFL test to demonstrate English language proficiency, the U.S. Medical Licensing Exam, and complete a residency program. The process takes several years, and each step of the way can be a barrier for foreign trained physicians. The state of Minnesota is the only U.S. jurisdiction to implement a program assisting foreign trained medical graduates in becoming credentialed in their state.

Nursing is another profession for which a national board defines credentialing requirements, although outlining the particulars of re-credentialing fall more heavily on state licensing boards. All states use the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN) and the National Council Licensure Examination for Practical Nurses (NCLEX-PN), and foreign trained nurses are expected to pass this exam to be qualified as a nurse in the U.S. Nurses are also expected to show English language proficiency following the passing standards defined by the National Councils of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) for various English language proficiency tests,¹⁰ but it may be left to state licensing boards to identify state specific standards for English proficiency. Valid credential evaluation organizations are also specified by state boards since NCSBN does not have an internal evaluation agency like ECFMG has.

The National Council of Examiners for Engineering and Surveying (NCEES) requires that foreign credentials be evaluated by the NCEES internal evaluation board before an individual may sit for the initial engineer/surveyor licensing exam. However, there are many

¹⁰ As of 2014, the NCSBN had passing standards for TOEFL iBT, IELTS, Pearson Test of English (PTE), and Michigan English Language Assessment Battery (MELAB).

engineering and surveying positions with U.S. companies that do not require licensing.¹¹ NCEES does not state English language requirements for individuals interested in re-credentialing in the U.S., which means English language proficiency may be based on the position description and employer needs. Research shows that licensing is not a great barrier for immigrants trained as engineers in the U.S. but gaining relevant work experience is.¹²

The credentialing process for the National Board of Medicine, the NCSBN, and NCEES are described here for two reasons. One, they are the most thoroughly explored processes for re-credentialing skilled immigrants and so they serve as complete examples. Two, they are just different enough from one another to exemplify the challenge of streamlining a one-size fits all process.

Barriers to Entry—English Language Proficiency:

The cost of limited English proficiency to individuals in the U.S. is substantial. Individuals with limited English proficiency earn 25-40% less than their English proficient counterparts.¹³ English language proficiency is also a proven barrier for skilled immigrants seeking to integrate into the U.S. workforce,^{14,15} and anecdotal evidence shows that the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) test in particular serves as a barrier to skilled immigrants attempting to enter the workforce in Oregon.¹⁶ However, little research has examined

¹¹ In the field of engineering in the U.S., only engineers responsible for signing off on projects must be licensed.

¹² Rabben, L. (2013). *Credential Recognition in the United States for Foreign Professionals*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.

¹³ Wilson, *Investing in English Skills*.

¹⁴ Batalova, J., Fix, M. & Bachmeier, J.D. (2016). *Untapped talent: The costs of brain waste among highly skilled immigrants in the United States*. Migration Policy Institute | New American Economy | World Education Services.

¹⁵ Bergson-Shilcock, A. & Witte, J. (2015). *Steps to success: Integrating immigrant professionals in the U.S.* New York, NY: World Education Services.

¹⁶ Lagouit, E. (2017). *Barriers and facilitators to professional licensure: Perspectives of foreign-trained pharmacists in Oregon*. Portland, OR: Oregon Advocacy Commissions.

the specific needs of skilled immigrants struggling to demonstrate their English language proficiency to enter the U.S. workforce.

The TOEFL test is the focus of this report because it is the most commonly used option for showing English language proficiency by state licensing boards in Oregon and across the U.S. The TOEFL tests a person's ability to use English at the university level, combining reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills. The test is most frequently delivered via the internet at certified testing centers across the U.S. An individual can take the TOEFL at a cost of \$200, and the score is valid for two years.

Preliminary research carried out for this report confirms that many state licensing boards in Oregon and other U.S. states require individuals educated in countries outside of the U.S. to achieve a specified minimal score on the TOEFL test in order to demonstrate English language proficiency. Minimal scores required for licensure vary depending by state licensing board.

TOEFL, TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication), and IELTS (International English Language Testing System) are the most commonly listed options for demonstrating English language proficiency in Oregon administrative rules for licensing boards. Each of these tests is scored differently, so minimum scores for each test are specified by individual licensing boards. Many boards have no language requirement listed in OAR, but this does not guarantee that a board does not, in fact, have language requirements. No evidence was found that a licensing board accepts alternatives to the standardized English language tests named above, although the Board of Pharmacy offers to waive any requirement if it will "further public health or safety."

Discussions with English language professionals and those working in diverse talent acquisition invariably lead to questions about the appropriacy of relying on standardized tests

designed to assess academic language skills for assessing the functional language skills of skilled immigrants. Some have suggested that an assessment that tests profession-specific vocabulary and communication strategies would be more appropriate. For example, the Clinician Cultural and Linguistic Assessment (CCLA), utilized by health care institutions in Oregon, determines the level of target language proficiency and cultural competency of bilingual physicians and others in the health care industry by engaging examinees in contextual conversations (R. Salonen, personal communication, May 28, 2018).

The question of appropriate English language tests is worth researching further. However, familiar tests like the TOEFL and IELTS are institutionalized as go-to English language proficiency exams in the U.S., as noted in their presence in licensing board requirements. Further, the standardized tests serve as a convenient resource for licensing boards and test takers alike given that the service is provided by an outside organization; a field-specific exam would require test development and scoring infrastructure, both of which come with substantial costs. With this stated, the considerable frustrations skilled immigrants share about their attempts to pass the TOEFL suggest that exploring tests like the CCLA and other opportunities for improving test-taking skills are worthwhile.

The TOEFL as a preferred test for language proficiency:

In general, little is known about the TOEFL test taking experience of skilled immigrants in Oregon or the U.S. beyond anecdotes about the challenges the test presents to individuals who have taken it. In the process of developing this report, we submitted a proposal for iBT (TOEFL internet-based test) testing data to Education Testing Services (ETS), the non-profit assessment organization that develops and manages the TOEFL test. The proposed study would analyze Oregon specific data on TOEFL test takers from 2005 to 2017 to assess trends related to profession, the number of times an individual has taken the test, test results, and other

demographic information made available. Due to necessary wait time for IRB approval and the ETS proposal process, a response is not expected from ETS before the end of this summer. If ETS agrees to share data, it will provide us the opportunity to observe trends that could help state leaders and policy makers understand how to best align support for TOEFL preparation.

An effort was also made to learn about potential alternatives to the TOEFL test. ETS does not currently develop evaluations for specific professions. ETS designs and develops the TOEFL and TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) tests for English language assessment, and other familiar ETS evaluation programs include the GRE and SAT exams.¹⁷ Efforts to contact ETS representatives to discover whether ETS has an interest in designing profession-specific tests proved unfruitful. However, details from the organization's website suggest that ETS works with clients to develop customized assessments for a variety of needs.¹⁸

III US National Best Practices:

There is evidence of significant work to address barriers to the workforce across the country: state legislatures have created taskforces for exploring career pathways for skilled immigrants¹⁹ and examining occupational licensing barriers.²⁰ State executive orders have also served to create Offices or Agendas for New Americans,^{21,22,23} and to require critical review of licensing processes, fees, and requirements to ameliorate licensing barriers at the state level.²⁴ Initiatives laid out in Executive Orders do not include clear measures for success and few

¹⁷ <https://www.ets.org/contact>

¹⁸ https://www.ets.org/about/what/assessment_development/

¹⁹ Minnesota Department of Health. (2015). *Task Force on Foreign-Trained Physicians: Report to the Minnesota Legislature 2015*. Minnesota Department of Health Division of Health Policy.

²⁰ Little Hoover Commission. (2016). *Jobs for Californians: Strategies to Ease Occupational Licensing Barriers, Report #234*. Sacramento, CA: Little Hoover Commission.

²¹ State of Michigan Exec. Order No. 2014-2 (2014).

²² Commonwealth of Massachusetts Exec. Order No. 503 (2008).

²³ State of Illinois Exec. Order No. 15-01 (2015).

²⁴ Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Exec. Order No. 2017-03 (2017).

programs publish reports sharing annual successes and challenges. This section describes what other states have done to facilitate re-credentialing and to create pathways for skilled immigrants.

Organizations and resources to help skilled immigrants connect to the workforce were collected and reviewed and the following observations made: 1) non-profit organizations provide direct services while state governments work to make licensing requirements more accessible, 2) cities such as Detroit, MI and Atlanta, GA have strong initiatives in support of skilled immigrants for the economic development of their jurisdictions, and 3) few clear measures of success and progress for implemented policies are available.

The Role of Non-Profit Organizations

Two non-profit organizations partner with other non-profits and government agencies in various states to provide pathway guidance and training to skilled immigrants seeking work. The Welcome Back Initiative²⁵ (specific to the health care field) and Upwardly Global²⁶ each seek to build partnerships to facilitate the integration of skilled immigrants into the workforce in those states. Through dedicated networks of support, these organizations can assist skilled immigrants in connecting to work experience that is otherwise inaccessible to them. Additionally, these organizations, through their experience placing skilled immigrants, can be more creative in exploring employment options an individual may want to explore—it is not always possible for a skilled immigrant to continue working in the same position they were trained for in their previous country.

Across the U.S., non-profit organizations serve skilled immigrants within their jurisdictions, and the programming offered varies greatly (see Appendix A for a list of highlights). What is clear is the fact that these organizations serve to organize and communicate

²⁵ Active in: CA, MA, WA, CO, NY, MD, RI

²⁶ Active in: CA, MI, IL, NY, NH

the pathways and process to workforce placement. The state of Michigan is unique in its effort to clarify licensing requirements for skilled immigrants in their state, making it easier for support organizations to guide immigrants through the re-credentialing process.

State Facilitation of Licensing Requirements

The Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA) has designed a pathways website for skilled immigrants to conveniently access licensing requirements specific to the foreign-trained population (i.e. including language and re-credentialing requirements) for 42 licensed occupations in that state. Michigan is the only state at this time found to have licensing information collected in one place. An individual need only access LARA's Online Resource for Skilled Immigrants page²⁷ and download the document outlining requirements for their profession, if it is listed. Each document includes a description of how the profession is organized in the state of Michigan, eligibility requirements, tests required, other careers and credentials (these include suggestions for lower level positions one may pursue to gain work experience or while waiting for credentials to be evaluated), and important links. In one stop, a skilled immigrant learns about requirements for re-credentialing in their field. It is a clear and easy way to access necessary information.

Only Idaho has a comparable resource for accessing licensing guides. Unlike Michigan, however, the Idaho resource is maintained by a non-profit called Global Talent Idaho (GTI) and not the state government. GTI also offers mentoring, networking, and internships to skilled immigrants like support organizations mentioned in the subsection above.

Executive Orders and Other Legislation

In several states, an executive order has created an Office of New Americans or ordered the review of licensing requirements throughout the state. Offices of New Americans are

²⁷ https://www.michigan.gov/lara/0,4601,7-154-10573_68301---,00.html

intended to direct services to immigrant populations, particularly those seeking entry into the workforce, while a review of licensing requirements allows policy makers to assess where licensing requirements may be too restrictive and need alteration. For example, Michigan's 2014 executive order created the Michigan Office for New Americans (MONA), designed to advise the governor and state departments on all matters regarding the formulation and implementation of immigration policies, programs, and procedures.

Pennsylvania's 2017 Executive Order, on the other hand, calls for a detailed report of each type of professional and occupational license issued by each Board or Commission in that state (Including training requirements; licensing, registration, and renewal fees; continuing education requirements) and also includes a review of *other states* which require a license for each professional or occupational license and national and regional averages for training requirements, fees, and continuing education requirements. While the Pennsylvania executive order is not specific to the immigrant population, the results have the potential to make accessing licensing requirements in that state easier. Other details regarding Executive Orders related to the re-credentialing of skilled immigrants are detailed in notes in Appendix B.

Minnesota stands out as a state making a commitment to connecting skilled immigrants to their state workforce through legislative action. Legislation created the Task Force on Immigrant International Medical Graduates in 2014 for the purpose of developing strategies to integrate refugee and asylee physicians into the Minnesota health care delivery system. Since then, Minnesota has acted on task force recommendations to facilitate the credentialing of foreign-trained physicians in that state, creating the International Medical Graduate Assistance Program to do so. The International Medical Graduate Assistance Program publishes program updates to the legislature covering successes and challenges of the program; the most recent was

made available in February 2017.²⁸ This was one of few programs found to document their program measures and analyses.

Most programs and organizations provide updates via newsletters and press releases and often include statistics regarding the number of individuals served or the number of skilled immigrants placed in the workforce, but regular annual reports relaying details regarding measures of success were not identified. Furthermore, efforts to contact representatives of state programs to discuss measures and progress for this research were unsuccessful.

IV Canada's process, pathways, and measures:

This report explored Canada's process, pathways, and measures for skilled immigrants to provide a comparison to observations in the U.S. Neither Canada nor the U.S. has a distinct model for connecting skilled immigrants to the workforce. Both systems rely on networked governance; many agencies and organizations meet immigrant needs along the path to the workforce. However, three differences between these countries' practices stand out at the federal level.

First, Canada utilizes a national framework²⁹ which serves to help coordinate practices and cooperation across Canadian provinces. The national framework serves as a "one stop" shop for skilled immigrants who want to know how to have their credentials evaluated, what language tests are acceptable, and other details about entering the Canadian workforce. It is not, however, a promised resource, since provinces have the authority to make changes specific to their jurisdiction.

²⁸ Minnesota Department of Health. (2017). *International Medical Graduate Assistance Program: Report to the Minnesota Legislature*. Minnesota Department of Health Division of Health Policy. Retrieved from <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/orhpc/img/documents/2017imgc.pdf>

²⁹ Government of Canada. (2016). *A Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/foreign-credential-recognition/funding-framework.html>

Second, the U.S. maintains the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), supporting only the refugee population, while Canada's Immigrant, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) serves all new arrivals to the country. Both countries fund some settlement services, but U.S. federal government intervention into settlement programming is minimal (funds tend to be handed off with little direction in terms of how services must be provided) while the Canadian federal government plays a larger role in how funds are spent by organizations providing services.

Third, English language requirements and benchmarks are similarly diverse in both Canada and the U.S., although the Pan-Canadian Framework likely helps to limit the variety of tests acceptable by professional boards throughout the country.³⁰ Chart 1, below, depicts approved English language assessments in Canada and the U.S. It should be noted, however, that the approving organization or program designates the acceptable test(s) for their purposes.

In Canada, the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) Offices have approved the tests listed in Chart 1 below, which likely promotes their use by other agencies and organizations throughout the country. The U.S. has no such approval process for language testing at the federal level, and so the list in Chart 1 includes only the most commonly found tests for English language proficiency found in licensing requirements throughout this research.

All of the tests included in Chart 1 are criterion-referenced tests and are, therefore, not designed to have a designated pass/fail score. Instead, institutions requiring the test identify a score that represents a sufficient level of language proficiency for their purpose. In Canada, a CELPIP score of 4 in listening and speaking (out of 12), or an IELTS score of 4.0 in speaking

³⁰ Immigrants to Canada can show French language proficiency instead of or in addition to English language proficiency; only English language assessments and requirements are discussed in this report.

and 4.5 in listening (out of 9), is necessary to apply for citizenship.³¹ The U.S. does not require that citizenship applicants submit English language proficiency test scores.

CHART 1. Approved English Language Assessments in Canada and the U.S.	
Canada	USA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IELTS (International English Language Testing System) • CELPIP (Canadian English Language Proficiency Index Program) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IELTS (International English Language Testing System) • TOEFL (Test of English as a Second Language) • TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) *The TOEIC is not commonly available at testing centers inside of the U.S.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The test you take depends on the program or organization requiring the test. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most of these tests offers multiple testing options: <i>General Test Option</i> or <i>Academic Test Option</i>, for example. The option you take depends on the program or organization requiring the test. 	

In both countries, individual professional boards have the authority to require any score they feel fits the needs of their population, and there is evidence that at least some professions set English language proficiency passing standards based on empirical research of language needs within their field.³² To provide a comparison of expected scores, the most common minimum IELTS score currently stated in licensing board OAR is 6.0 in all modules and an overall score of 6.5. Portland State University’s minimum overall score for matriculating international students is 6.0. This comparison indicates that licensing boards expect applicants’ English language proficiency to be sufficient for university matriculation in the U.S., which is a point of critique for some hoping to reduce barriers to re-credentialing for skilled immigrants. On the one hand, if trained in the U.S., individuals would be required to pass a TOEFL or similar test in order to matriculate into the university system, so it is logical that skilled immigrants trained elsewhere

³¹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/canadian-citizenship/become-canadian-citizen/eligibility/language-proof/step-6.html>

³² Qian, H., Woo, A., & Banerjee, J. (2014). *Setting an English Language Proficiency Passing Standard for Entry-Level Nursing Practice Using the Michigan English Language Assessment Battery*. National Council of State Boards of Nursing.

meet the same criteria before going to work. On the other hand, the language competencies required to function in the work setting well can be strikingly different from those necessary for success in the university setting, so, proponents of this philosophy argue, why not assess language competency based on functionality?

Although Paul Feltman, Deputy Executive Director at World Education Services (WES),³³ made clear that differences did not make one countries' re-credentialing system superior or more streamlined than the other (personal communication, May 2, 2018), it can be assumed that these differences play a significant role in the extent to which policy diffusion across national borders is possible. See Appendix C for a 2-page briefing sheet outlining the comparison between Canadian and U.S. re-credentialing pathway models and success measures.

Recommendations

Oregon Policy:

- Integrate clear goals and measures into any new initiatives so that program assessment and review of processes can benefit the future of the initiative
- Consider integrating the concept of a framework to Oregon's overall development plan for scaffolding pathways to the workforce for skilled immigrants.
- Conduct a review of Oregon licensing boards to (1) organize licensing information for skilled immigrants on a single website and (2) identify unnecessarily obstructive licensing requirements
- Identify whether the legislature has the authority to ask target licensing boards to make changes to OAR for the purpose of reducing barriers to skilled immigrants
- English language proficiency:
 - Short term—
Support TOEFL preparation courses specifically targeted toward the skilled immigrant population to assist individuals preparing to take the TOEFL test develop necessary test-taking strategies
 - Long term—
Consider researching precedent for tests of English other than the TOEFL, TOEIC, and IELTS in the workforce context such as the Clinician Cultural and Linguistic Assessment (CCLA)

³³ WES is a non-profit credential evaluation organization with over 40 years working within Canada and the U.S. Paul Feltman serves as the Director of WES Global Talent Bridge, developing outreach and education programs, community partnerships, and policy initiatives focused on helping immigrants successfully integrate into academic and professional settings.

Coalition Building and Partnerships:

- Target licensing bodies to develop strategic relationships going forward
- Partner with World Education Services (WES) to develop Oregon's pathways based on existing best practices and to position Oregon as a standards pioneer in providing skilled immigrants access to the work force

Future Research:

- Clarify barriers specific to Oregon skilled immigrants: Research to identify and assess the existing network relationships serving skilled immigrants in Oregon and understanding the extent to which organizations and agencies are involved in skilled immigrant pathways; assess whether individuals seeking work use the pathways as expected
- Continue to follow the development of regional initiatives in Canada, particularly the partnership between Ontario and WES³⁴

Concluding Remarks

The problem of skilled immigrant underemployment is first about access to information and second about facilitating a pathway for successfully meeting re-credentialing requirements. Currently, the infrastructure in place for finding information about and becoming re-credentialed is obstructive at best and impossible at worst. In Oregon, attention to licensing requirements and the consolidation of such requirements for skilled immigrants will be a strong start to ameliorating the frustration of the re-credentialing process. The state has the ability to make it more possible for hard working skilled individuals in the state to meet their work goals. Our economy and, indeed, our society count on it.

³⁴ Documentation Standards Project Working Group. (2012). *Best practices: Strategies and processes to obtain authentic international educational credentials*. Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration: World Education Services.

APPENDIX A

1. Non-profit organizations and programs serving skilled immigrants within their jurisdiction:
 - a. Philadelphia: The Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians is a non-profit serving international professionals in Philadelphia.³⁵
 - i. International Professionals Program—connecting skilled immigrants to workforce in the Philadelphia area
 - ii. Immigrant Fellowship Program (launched fall 2017)—internship partnership with the City of Philadelphia Department of Commerce
 - b. New York:
 - i. The Cooper Union Retraining Program for Immigrant Engineers (in conjunction with CAMBA Workforce Development)
 - c. Kentucky:
 - i. KentuckianaWorks Manufacturer Training for English Language Learners—one of few manufacturing programs for skilled immigrants, integrates English language development
 - d. Michigan:
 - i. The MI Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (LARA) has designed a pathways website for skilled immigrants to conveniently access licensing requirements specific to the foreign-trained population (i.e. including language and re-credentialing requirements) for 42 licensed occupations
 - e. Idaho:

³⁵ <https://welcomingcenter.org/>

- i. Global Talent Idaho (GTI) offers mentoring, networking, and internships to skilled immigrants
- ii. The GTI website serves as a portal for skilled immigrants to access licensing guides and links to credential evaluation resources in an organized manner

APPENDIX B Executive Orders—Working Notes

Massachusetts:

- EO 503 (2008) launches the **New American Agenda**, *Governor's Advisory Council for Refugees and Immigrants, Massachusetts Office of Refugees and Immigrants, Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition*
- Mass. New Americans Agenda article (2009)
 - Highlights integration
 - Three sources of information: existing research, a series of topic specific policy meetings, and a series of six public meetings held across the state
 - Relied on the input and assistance of community-based organizations
- Eng. language recommendation (#2 in importance after civil rights)
 - Existing state funding for ABE and ESL
 - Existing ESOL for ABE standards

Michigan:

- EO 2014-12 (2014) creates Office for New Americans
 - Coordinate exec branch agencies responsible for programs related to services for immigrants
 - Lead Global Michigan Initiative
 - Analyze and make recommendations re. policies relating to immigrants
 - Develop sustainable partnerships with existing community foundation, non-profit, and private sector service providers
 - Provide information to other exec branch agencies
 - Engage in state and federal advocacy
 - **NO reference to assessment/measurement**
- MONA awards grants to organizations for ESL funding
(<https://www.michigan.gov/ona/0,5629,7-323-67450-399156--,00.html>)

New York:

- EO26 (2011) Language Access

Pennsylvania:

- EO2017-03 (Review of State Professional and Occupational Licensure Board Requirements)
 - Training requirements; licensing, registration, and renewal fees; continuing education requirements; average timeframe for approval of each type of license; information regarding the number of other states which require a license for each professional or occupational license, as well as the national and regional averages for training requirements, fees, and continuing education requirements; any interstate compacts or reciprocity agreements that exist
 - Report due: the sooner of 180 days from establishment of advisory group OR 210 days from the effective date of order (October 2017)

Illinois:

- EO15-01 Establishing Governor's New Americans' Welcoming Initiative; EO15-02 Establishing Governor's New Americans' Trust Initiative
 - 15-01: makes information related to residency available

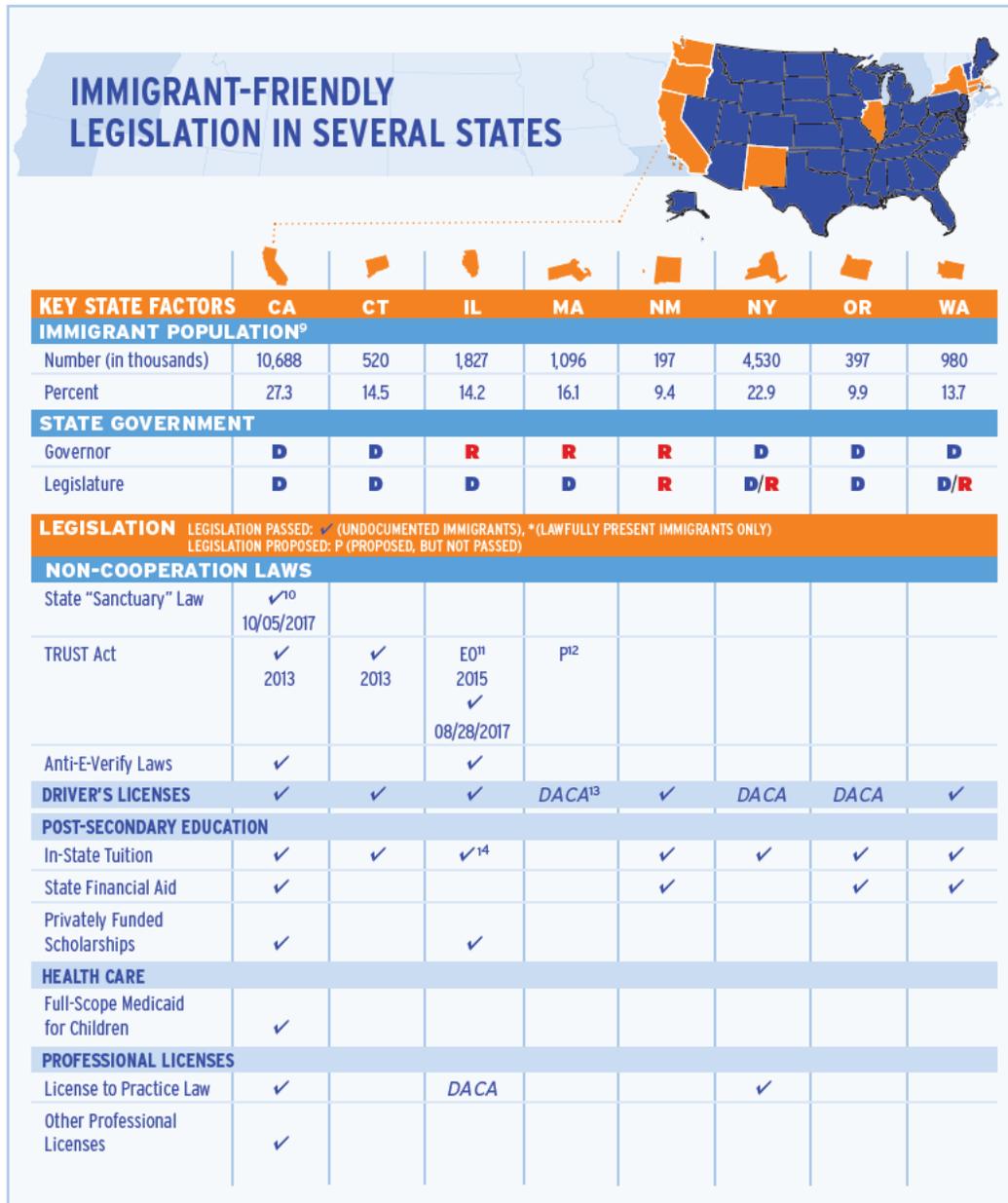
- 15-02: makes detention or arrest of individuals solely based on immigration/citizenship status unlawful

Federal:

- The White House (June 17, 2016): steps to reducing unnecessary occupational licenses <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/06/17/fact-sheet-blue-steps-reduce-unnecessary-occupation-licenses-are-limiting>

Other:

- New York Immigration Coalition. (November 2017). *Blueprint for Immigrant New York*, p. 4.



While the chart above covers legislation, it is important to note that New York has been able to enact immigrant-friendly policies through agency rulemaking, the most significant example being healthcare coverage for undocumented young immigrants.

APPENDIX C

Canadian and US Occupational Pathways for Skilled Immigrants:

Neither Canada nor the US has a distinct model for connecting skilled immigrants to the workforce. Both systems rely on networked governance; many agencies and organizations meet immigrant needs along the path to the workforce. However, three differences between these countries' practices stand out at the federal level:

- 1) Canada utilizes a national framework³⁶ which serves to help coordinate practices and cooperation across Canadian provinces;
- 2) The U.S. maintains the ORR Office of Refugee Resettlement) only for Refugee support while Canada's IRCC (Immigrant, Refugees and Citizenship Canada) serves all new arrivals to the country;
- 3) Both countries fund some settlement services, but U.S. federal government intervention into settlement programming is minimal while the Canadian federal government plays a larger role in how funds are spent by organizations providing services.

Although a discussion with an organizational leader familiar with both the Canadian and the U.S. context made clear that these differences did not make one countries' re-credentialing system superior or more streamlined than the other, it can be assumed that these differences play a significant role in the extent to which policy diffusion across national borders is possible.

Below, three initiatives identified below represent possible regional coalitions for serving skilled immigrants seeking access to the workforce in their areas. Page two of this brief displays a chart comparing Occupational Pathways for Skilled Immigrants in Canada and the U.S.

Canadian Initiatives:

Toronto Regional Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC)—employer-led organization coordinating multi-stakeholder engagement to address barriers to employment.³⁷ See also TRIEC Local Immigrant Partnerships and Mentoring Program.

U.S. Initiatives:

Welcoming Economies Global Network—coalition of organizations (governments, non-profits, and economic development organizations) spanning 10 "rust belt" states "The Network is designed to strengthen the work, maximize the impact, and sustain the efforts of individual local initiatives across the region that welcome, retain, and empower immigrant communities as valued contributors to local economies."³⁸

Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education (CCCIE)—"builds the capacity of community colleges to accelerate immigrant and refugee success and raises awareness of the essential role these colleges play in advancing immigrant integration in communities."³⁹ By sharing expertise and innovative strategies to provide the best education for immigrants and refugees.

³⁶ [A Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications](#)

³⁷ <http://triec.ca/>

³⁸ <http://www.weglobalnetwork.org/about/>

³⁹ <http://www.cccie.org/about/>

Comparing Occupational Pathways for Skilled Immigrants in Canada and the U.S.	
Canada	United States
<i>Pan-Canadian Framework for Assessment of Foreign Qualifications</i> : an intergovernmental forum established to strengthen cooperation and strategic thinking in Canada	
Federal Gov't: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) Settlement Program —immigrant integration services accessible to all new arrivals to Canada	Federal Gov't: Office of Refugee Resettlement —immigrant integration services accessible to refugees only
Funding: gov't plays large role in funding organizations to deliver settlement services on its behalf	Funding: gov't intervention to settlement programming minimal— integration is largely self-led by immigrants
Network: educational providers, community agencies, advocate groups, governments, employers and business advocates work together to facilitate the connection of skilled immigrants to the workforce	
Educational Credential Assessment	
Required to receive points in Comprehensive Ranking System in pre-screening immigration protocol; must use one of 5 approved (medical and pharmaceutical specific to professional boards) Education Credentialing Agencies	Dependent on licensing board or organization—two accreditation organizations in the US (NACES and ICE) accredit several credentialing organizations, some that specialize by occupation.
Mentorships / Internships	
TRIEC's Mentoring Partnership ⁴⁰ —successfully engages employers in training skilled immigrants	Upwardly Global— <i>midternships</i> for individuals in non-regulated professions, seeking employment in mid-level management in some states
Career Edge ⁴¹ —works with employers to provide paid internships	
Apprenticeships	
Red Seal Program ⁴² , managed by the Canadian Council of Directors of Apprenticeship (CCDA), sets common standards to assess skills of tradespeople across Canada	Recent U.S. Department of Labor Apprenticeship Initiative may lead to expansion of apprenticeship programs across the states. ⁴³
Support for Licensing	
Access Centre for Regulated Employment ⁴⁴ —helps navigate relicensing in Ontario, Canada	Welcome Back Initiative ⁴⁵ —assistance navigating re-licensing for health professionals in 10 cities
See also Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications ⁴⁶	

⁴⁰ <http://www.mentoringpartnership.ca/>

⁴¹ <https://www.careeredge.ca/>

⁴² <http://www.red-seal.ca/information/f.4r.2.3gnw.4rk.2rs-eng.html>

⁴³ <https://www.dol.gov/sites/default/files/2016-apprenticeship-state-project-summaries.pdf>

⁴⁴ <http://www.accesscentre.ca/home>

⁴⁵ <https://www.wbcenters.org/>

⁴⁶ [A Pan-Canadian Framework for the Assessment and Recognition of Foreign Qualifications](#)

