

Built to Work: A Framework for Designing Immigration and Integration Systems for Success

For decades, immigration and integration have been addressed separately, often resulting in immigration happening to, rather than with, communities. Immigrants and immigration have long contributed to our nation's prosperity. Still, immigrants' full potential is realized or lost at the local level, within systems that connect people to good work, recognize their skills, and help communities address workforce needs.

Communities nationwide face labor shortages, demographic change, and increased pressure on essential services. Addressing these challenges requires strategies that strengthen economic health and build on the assets that local areas already have.

In practice, immigration and integration work together. Immigration shapes who arrives, while integration determines whether people and communities can thrive. Bringing immigration and integration together as economic infrastructure recognizes talent, supports good work, and turns opportunity into shared prosperity.

That is the central argument of *Built to Work: A Framework for Designing Immigration and Integration Systems for Success*, developed by World Education Services. Immigration and integration should be viewed as parts of a single economic system. When aligned, they expand workforce participation, strengthen economies, and build public confidence in immigration pathways.

Ideas for Action

1. Strengthen integration capacity.

- **Make workforce programs work better.** Include immigrants and immigration in the workforce and economic planning structures that shape opportunity for everyone.
- **Tap state and local expertise.** Bring regional knowledge of labor markets, employers, workers, and community conditions into system design and implementation.
- **Use data.** Establish regular routines for reviewing the local workforce landscape, outcomes, and stakeholder feedback rather than rely only on static assumptions or national averages.
- **Invest strategically.** Align funding and incentives to build durable, scalable systems for credential recognition, workforce navigation, coordination, employer engagement, and data use.

2. Design immigration pathways with successful integration in mind.

- **Bring integration expertise into immigration design.** Use the knowledge, partnerships, data, and experience developed through state and local integration efforts to inform immigration policy and pathway improvement.
- **Design responsive pathways.** Connect pathways to workforce and integration infrastructure and align them with changing economic conditions, community priorities, and opportunities for stability and advancement. This will allow immigrants to quickly access jobs that match their skills and experience, and to contribute to local workforce and economic development goals.
- **Measure outcomes and strengthen accountability.** Track whether pathways help workers make use of their skills, help employers meet persistent needs, and produce visible community benefits. Apply those results and ongoing feedback to improve immigration policies and strengthen public confidence.

Looking Ahead

Built to Work is a starting point, not a prescription. It's a framework system leaders can adapt to meet the needs of their own communities. By making immigration and integration a part of economic planning, communities can better connect talent to opportunity and fully share in the benefits that follow.

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**Explore the
framework:**



ABOUT WES World Education Services is a non-profit social enterprise that supports the educational, economic, and social inclusion of immigrants, refugees, and international students.