

# Tackling Brain Waste

Finding Hidden Talent and Ensuring All Workers Can  
Contribute to their Fullest Potential

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## Background

**T**he term “brain waste” refers to the severe underemployment of millions of foreign-educated immigrants and refugees living in the United States. Despite having high levels of education and experience in industries with growing demand—such as engineering, medicine, and finance—many foreign professionals struggle to transfer their qualifications to the U.S. labor market. Instead, they may end up working in low-skilled or labor-intensive jobs and earning far below their potential, while companies in need of such talent struggle to fill key positions for which these individuals may be qualified.

Reasons work-authorized, college-educated immigrants and refugees may experience brain waste:

- Lack of professional networks in field of expertise
- Lack of familiarity with U.S. workplace and job application process
- Lack of sufficient language skills
- Difficulty transferring credentials from home countries
- Difficulty navigating complex and sometimes lengthy relicensing or recertification process

## Why It Matters

Brain waste not only impacts individual immigrants and their families, but it also hurts employers and industries seeking talent; reduces the earnings potential and spending power of households across communities; and lowers the tax revenue collected by localities, states, and the federal government.

A recent study from the Migration Policy Institute, New American Economy, and World Education Services found that:<sup>1</sup>

### Nationally

- Nearly **2M** highly-skilled immigrants in the United States are working in low-skilled jobs or are unemployed.
- Immigrant underemployment represents a lost opportunity for the U.S. economy, resulting in **\$39.4B** dollars in forgone earnings and **\$10.2B** in tax payments annually at federal, state, and local levels.

### By State

- Florida: **32%** of immigrants are underemployed
- California: **\$9.4B** in forgone earnings
- Texas: **\$167.5M** in forgone state and local tax revenue

## What Communities Are Doing

Despite these challenges, local communities are developing innovative approaches to addressing brain waste that will improve the earnings and tax revenue contributions of their residents, help meet employer demand, and bring together immigrant jobseekers with their U.S.-born counterparts.

### Greater Louisville International Professionals (GLIP)

GLIP's goal is to make Louisville a more attractive, welcoming place for global talent by bringing together international professionals based in metro Louisville with experienced local professionals to form connections, source talent, and help newcomers navigate the jobseeking process.

GLIP offers:

- Global **talent sourcing** to local business and community organizations
- **Relocation assistance** to help new international families connect with people, organizations, and businesses in Louisville
- Connections between Louisville's businesses and international communities to support **personal and professional development**
- A **digital platform** for sharing international events and activities across the region

*“GLIP has played an incredible role in attracting, engaging and retaining international professionals in the city of Louisville.*

*For any new international professional in the city, **GLIP***

***opens the door to a welcom-***

***ing community and support system** they can rely on. GLIP is an asset to the city, its businesses, and the international community—something other cities can try and emulate.”*

— Vipin Gopal, Enterprise Vice President of Clinical Analytics, Humana

For more information on GLIP...

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## St. Louis Professional Connectors

Sponsored by the St. Louis Mosaic Project and the St. Louis Regional Chamber, the Professional Connectors program brings together “globally-minded professionals” in St. Louis with foreign-born and other newcomer jobseekers. Volunteer professionals in the region agree to meet and share their industry knowledge with jobseekers, and also connect them with other local professionals. The program helps newcomers build their professional networks in the St. Louis region and gain a better understanding of the U.S. workplace and job application process for their industries, and it has

also helped employers in the region identify a previously hidden talent pool.

For more information on St. Louis Professional Connectors...

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*“As soon as I arrived in St. Louis, I was told that to find a good job, networking was critical. The St. Louis Mosaic Project has helped me connect with companies and people, opening important doors that wouldn’t have been accessible with a resume alone. **The Mosaic Project has made me feel very welcome.**”*

— Marcelo Pesce, St. Louis Professional Connector Participant

## How Your Chamber Can Play a Role

### 1. Consult

community organizations—and particularly refugee resettlement agencies—that work with immigrant and refugee jobseekers to identify the existing talent pool

### 2. Convene

community organizations and employers to discuss challenges and opportunities for collaboration

### 3. Tap

local networks to source volunteer professionals interested in connecting with newcomer jobseekers

### 4. Sponsor

organizations, events, and opportunities to bring together professionals in your area

### 5. Utilize

online tools such as Upwardly Global's network for potential employers<sup>2</sup> and Business Leaders United for Workforce Partnership's network<sup>3</sup>

## National Organizations and Resources

- **New American Economy:**<sup>4</sup> National and state-level data on the scope of brain waste.
- **Migrating Policy Institute:**<sup>5</sup> National and state-level data on the scope of brain waste, as well as policy recommendations for addressing brain waste
- **IMPRINT Project:**<sup>6</sup> Information and best practices for addressing brain waste at the federal, state, and local levels
- **Upwardly Global:**<sup>7</sup> Resources and assistance for immigrant jobseekers, employers, organizations, and communities working to address brain waste
- **World Education Services:**<sup>8</sup> Resources and career and re-credentialing services for workers

*“As a highly diverse organization, we at Celergo have found in Upwardly Global **the ideal partner** for our recruiting efforts. Many of our employees are first-generation U.S. citizens or came to the U.S. as young children with their parents. This inherent diversity allows us to be successful in meeting the global needs of our clients.*

*Upwardly Global alumni can easily assimilate into our diverse culture, which allows them to become **more successful in their positions** in a short amount of time.”*

— Michele Honomichl, Founder, Executive Chairman & Chief Strategy Officer, Celergo

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1 New American Economy, Migration Policy Institute and World Education Services, *Untapped Talent: The Costs of Brain Waste Among Highly-Skilled Immigrants in the United States*, December 2016  
2 [www.UpwardlyGlobal.org/employers](http://www.UpwardlyGlobal.org/employers)  
3 [www.BusinessLeadersUnited.org/who](http://www.BusinessLeadersUnited.org/who)  
4 [www.NewAmericanEconomy.org](http://www.NewAmericanEconomy.org)  
5 [www.MigrationPolicy.org](http://www.MigrationPolicy.org)  
6 [www.ImprintProject.org](http://www.ImprintProject.org)  
7 [www.UpwardlyGlobal.org](http://www.UpwardlyGlobal.org)  
8 [www.WES.org](http://www.WES.org)