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**What's New**

▶ [Workforce Development Policy Forum 2004/5](#)  
 The 2004-5 Workforce Development Policy Forum "Innovation Matters! Building Competitive Advantage

**Social, Economic & Workforce Programs Division**

[Text Version](#)  
 02/15/2000

**Enhancing Employment Opportunities for Individuals with Limited English Proficiency and Cultural Barriers**

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 Social, Economic & Workforce Programs Division

**Some communities and states are developing special programs to assist limited- or non-English speaking welfare recipients to move into the workplace by integrating language instruction with employment preparation.**

NGA Center for Best Practices, February 15-16, 2000

**Background**

More than forty percent of foreign-born families in the United States live in poverty. Many low-income individuals with limited English skills also have limited educational attainment, test lower on basic skills tests, have poorer health compared to the native population and face limited opportunities for employment due to communications problems. Moreover, cultural norms may discourage employment outside the home for women and/or leaving children in the care of non-relatives or child care centers. Additionally, some foreign-born families are distrustful of the very government agencies that could assist them while others may be ineligible for government assistance.

Some communities and states are developing special programs to assist limited- or non-English speaking welfare recipients to move into the workplace by integrating language instruction with employment preparation. For example, increasingly, English as a second language (ESL) programs--based both in community colleges and adult education programs--are preparing immigrants for the workforce through several approaches:

- incorporating employment readiness skills development based on the SCANS workplace competencies;
- orienting English language instruction to the specific vocabulary, procedures and concepts needed for a particular field or job {i.e., vocational ESL (VESL)}; and
- providing ESL instruction in the work environment

**Areas of Interest**

- [Education Division](#)
- [Social, Economic & Workforce Programs Division](#)
- [Health Division](#)
- [Homeland Security & Technology Division](#)
- [Environment, Energy, & Natural Resources Division](#)

**Front & Center**

▶▶▶ Read past issues of [Front & Center](#), the Center's weekly newsletter on Center projects and events, state best practices, federal policies affecting states, links to respected research, and quick analysis on hot topics.

in States" presented participants...

▶ [Enhancing Competitiveness: A Review of Recent State Economic Development Initiatives](#)

States launched a variety of economic development initiatives over the last year, despite limited resources...

▶ [Webcast Video Files \(December - 2004\) Webcast Information Page...](#)

▶ [Webcast Series Video Files \(September - 2004\) Webcast Information Page...](#)

▶ [A Governors Guide to Children's Cabinets](#)  
Governors' Children's Cabinets are collaborative governance structures that seek to promote coordination across state agencies...

[All Documents](#)

so that the language objectives are determined by the worker, employer and work tasks.

In addition to language and skills training, supports such as child care, transportation, case management and mentoring as well as health and mental health services are needed to smooth the transition to work and help individuals remain employed. Lessons learned from refugee assistance programs have demonstrated that these services must be delivered in a culturally-appropriate manner. Some programs are finding success by linking with culturally-based community organizations that can provide some services directly or help the individual to access other agencies and supports.

In this session, panelists and participants will discuss what it takes to assist individuals with limited English to move into the workplace, including integrating ESL with employment training, and developing ties with community-based organizations and the employer community.

**Panel**

[Heide Wrigley](#), Aguirre International, San Mateo, CA, 650/373-4923

[Kathleen Bombach](#), El Paso Community College, El Paso, TX, 915/831-4432

[Hiroko Kurihara](#), East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation, Oakland, CA, 510/287-5353

**Issues and Questions**

What are the challenges to serving immigrants with limited English skills? What lessons can we learn from refugee resettlement programs? How do cultural norms vary among ethnic groups and how might these differences influence program design and choice of providers?

There are several approaches to integrating language instruction with employment training (general employment readiness, VESL and workplace ESL). How should these programs be designed to be most successful? Who is likely to benefit most from the different models? How important is it to involve the employer in program development and how does one do this?

What funding sources are available to train individuals with limited English skills? How easy is it to combine different federal and state funding streams?

A comprehensive program that provides services ranging from language and skill development, job training and placement, and post-employment supports and services will necessarily involve a wide range of partners. What has experience shown about who needs to be at the table

and what services need to be provided?

Do individuals with limited English skills face greater challenges to job retention? If so, how can this be addressed? What has been the experience of these individuals in taking advantage of career advancement training opportunities beyond initial job placement? What occupational areas offer the most opportunity for individuals with limited English to pursue a career path?

What policies or programs can be adopted at the state level to encourage the creation of community-based efforts that build upon neighborhood resources and strengths?

### **Resources and Publications**

[Current Concepts and Terms in Adult ESL](#), MaryAnn Cunningham Florez, National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education, November 1998.

*Education = Success: Empowering Hispanic Youth and Adults*, Anthony Carnevale, Educational Testing Service and Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, December 1999. Available from ETS Communication Services, 609/734-5050.

[Integrating Employment Skills in Adult ESL Instruction](#), Allene Guss Grognet, National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education (NCLE), June 1997.

[Ancillary Services to Support Welfare to Work](#), (in PDF), Amy Johnson, Alicia Meckstroth, Mathematica Policy Research, June 1998.

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