



Forming and Sustaining Effective Partnerships for Immigrant Integration and Inclusion

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Integrated English Literacy and Civics

Education (IELCE) providers play a key role in supporting the civic, economic, and linguistic integration for immigrants and New Americans. IELCE activities help meet these needs through improved English language proficiency and the acquisition of the skills “needed to function effectively as parents, workers, and citizens in the United States.”¹

Given the varied and significant needs of immigrants and the complexity of the immigrant integration and inclusion process, adult education programs providing IELCE activities cannot achieve this mission alone. Instead, “a constellation of organizations must be deliberately bridged in a way that leverages their unique strengths in order to achieve immigrant integration.”² Central to this philosophy is the idea that immigrant and refugee adult learners are not only participants in this process but also change agents.³ Adult learners can drive programmatic decisions about partnership and service delivery by sharing their interests, choices, and needs.

The **Enhancing Access for Refugees and New Americans** project aims to support adult educators in developing and delivering high-quality IELCE/IET programming in alignment with an immigrant integration approach.

Enhancing Access Spotlights describe and provide examples of specific aspects of IELCE/IET implementation.

The ecosystem of services that can support immigrant integration and inclusion is funded through federal investments from the U.S. Departments of Commerce, Education, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Justice, Labor, and State.⁴ Through these investments, along with those from state and local governments, philanthropy, and industry, an ecosystem of service providers exists that can, when working collaboratively, successfully help immigrants acclimate and integrate into their new communities.

¹ Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, 29 USC § 3272, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2022-title29/pdf/USCODE-2022-title29-chap32-subchapII-sec3272.pdf>.

² Silja Kallenbach, Kien S. Lee, Susan Downs-Karkos, and Madeleine Beaubien Taylor, “Adult Education and Immigrant Integration: Networks for Integrating New Americans (NINA) Theoretical Framework,” World Education, 2013, https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/NINA_theoretical_framework.pdf.

³ “Ecosystem for Equitable ESOL Learning and Digital Resilience,” World Education, <https://worlded.org/digital-equity/tide/>.

⁴ See the “Federal Supports for Immigrant Integration and Inclusion” graphic for more information about the roles each of these departments play in supporting immigrant integration and inclusion: <https://lincs.ed.gov/sites/default/files/IELCEFederalRoadmap.pdf>.

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Many adult education agencies already partner with other immigrant-serving organizations for the purpose of better meeting the needs of these learners. Although partners may vary depending on the context, they often include:

- **Refugee resettlement agencies**, which can provide services to resettle refugees and asylees to help them achieve self-sufficiency.
- **Organizations that provide citizenship preparation instruction** or immigration legal services.
- **Immigrant-led organizations** (e.g., organizations that focus on one or more immigrant groups) that provide culturally specific services, peer networks, and first language supports.
- **Workforce training or job placement providers** that help immigrants prepare for and attain good jobs that leverage their education, training, and multilingualism.
- **Local industry and employers** that can provide good jobs to meet learners' economic integration goals.
- **Financial empowerment centers** that help immigrants understand U.S. financial systems and how to engage in them.
- **Labor unions and labor management initiatives, employers, and community college or university partners** that support the development of career pathways by providing work-based learning opportunities and employment-related benefits.
- **Organizations that can support equitable access to technology**, including internet and digital devices.
- **Local partners such as libraries, schools, and faith-based organizations** can also provide additional supports, such as housing, clothing, transportation, childcare, and food assistance.

This spotlight describes how to form and sustain effective partnerships with the goal of promoting immigrant integration and inclusion. It introduces considerations for forming partnerships and examines seven essential elements of sustaining effective partnerships to support immigrant integration and inclusion, particularly in IELCE and other adult education activities. The spotlight includes suggestions for implementing the essential elements and shares examples of how state adult education agencies and adult education programs/ IELCE providers have used these strategies.



Considerations for Identifying Partners and Forming Effective Partnerships

Adult education providers can consider forming partnerships to offer more comprehensive services, including IELCE activities, to promote immigrant integration and inclusion. Some considerations for identifying partners and forming partnerships include:

1. Aligning with student needs

Many partnerships form to meet the wide range of needs of adult learners, especially since adult education providers often cannot address the full range of needs (e.g., housing, transportation, childcare). As adult education providers identify learner needs, providers can determine which needs can be met through existing resources and supports and which needs require partnerships to meet.

2. Considering history with the prospective partner

Adult education providers will want to consider their organization's history with potential partners to make informed selections, build on existing relationships or efforts, and/or refine partnership strategies based on lessons learned. If there are other local adult education providers, they may also want to consider approaching the potential partner together.

3. Understanding partner services with student eligibility

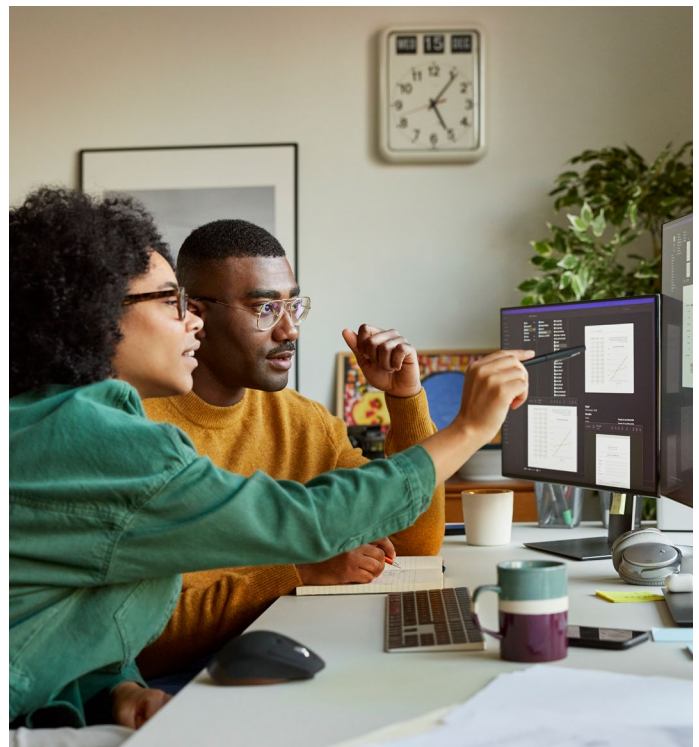
To make the case for partnership, adult education providers should be able to articulate learners' strengths and needs and how a partnership may meet the needs of the partner's clients or employees. To do so, adult education providers must understand potential partners' missions, operations, requirements, student eligibility, accountability systems, and capacity.

4. Building the relationship with the prospective partner

Adult education providers should build in frequent touch points with the partner, such as through invitations to visit the program and attend events.

5. Securing leadership commitment

Adult education providers should seek buy-in, guidance, and approval for the partnership from provider leadership before the partnership is formed. As memoranda of understanding or other formal agreements are developed and signed, leadership should be involved throughout the process.



Essential Elements of Sustaining Effective Partnerships

The essential elements described in this spotlight were informed by lessons learned from the Adult Education and Immigrant Integration: Networks for Integrating New Americans initiative⁵ that supported adult education programs in their immigrant integration and inclusion efforts. The essential elements of effective partnerships are:

- Shared goals, activities, and benchmarks
- Coordination and staffing
- Clarity of roles and responsibilities
- Communication and transparency
- A process for tracking progress and outcomes
- A process for decision-making and governance
- Allocation of funding and other resources

The next sections describe each element, identify why it is important, provide suggestions for implementation, and offer examples of how IELCE providers have implemented the elements. The examples of these successful partnerships were identified through a landscape scan of the field conducted by the Enhancing Access for Refugees and New Americans (EARN) project.

Shared Goals, Activities, and Benchmarks

Partnership activities should be guided by clear goals, activities, and benchmarks that are agreed to by all partners. For example, partnerships may want to (1) identify shared objectives, (2) develop activities and benchmarks, and (3) offer more comprehensive services provided through the partnership.

Implementation Suggestions:

- Draw on an immigrant integration framework to consider and prioritize goals that may be shared by IELCE providers and partners.
- Create a shared workplan with a detailed timeline that can be revisited and modified as the partnership's work progresses. The process of developing a workplan can take several meetings with advance prep work, such as draft goals and activities. The workplan can include action steps that support all elements described in this spotlight: coordination and staffing, roles, communications, tracking progress and outcomes, decision-making, and resource allocation.
- Balance ambitious goals, such as immigrant integration and inclusion, with actionable activities, like increased enrollment in IELCE/Integrated Education and Training (IET) programming or referrals to immigrant-serving organizations, that yield early progress and motivation for long-term goals.

⁵ The Networks for Integrating New Americans initiative, funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, aimed to strengthen adult education programs' ability to improve immigrants' access to effective English language acquisition programming, support immigrants on the path to citizenship, and support immigrants' career development through training and education. More information about the project can be found at: <https://worlded.org/adult-esol-programs-as-agents-of-immigrant-integration/>.

Element in Action: Shared Goals, Activities, and Benchmarks

The Sequoias Adult Education Consortium in California partners with two local workforce investment boards—Kings County Job Training Office and Workforce Investment Board of Tulare County—to deliver services to adult learners. The partners shared a goal of developing a joint initiative, Talent Pool, to improve the way clients were prepared for employment. Talent Pool participants engage in career planning and develop a career map that presents their education and training trajectory. The career map is shared among partners so they can coordinate support for the learner to help them transition seamlessly between services and avoid duplication or siloing of information.

Coordination and Staffing

Dedicating staff time to both coordinating and implementing the partnership's activities and communications helps support implementation and accountability.

Implementation Suggestions:

- New programming or processes take time to implement. Partnerships must consider what is feasible with the available resources.
- Communicate clearly to staff the expectations for participation in partnership activities, such as attending planning or public-facing meetings, and include the expectations in relevant job descriptions.
- Provide staff with professional development on cultivating and maintaining partnerships.

Element in Action: Coordination and Staffing

The South Bay Consortium for Adult Education (SBCAE) includes four community colleges and five school districts in Santa Clara, California. For the Community Collections project, SBCAE staff aimed to create a reciprocal referral network, with warm handoffs between partners to provide a seamless transition for students. They also collaborated to develop policies and procedures for implementing referral processes to improve student experiences, such as by eliminating the need for students to provide the same information to multiple partners. SBCAE recognized that staff time would be needed to coordinate and track this large-scale referral process and supported staff accordingly.

Clarity of Roles and Responsibilities

Staff roles and responsibilities emerge from the partnership's efforts to identify how each partner will contribute to the overall objectives.

Implementation Suggestion:

- Clearly delineate partner roles and responsibilities with and for designated staff in consideration of their existing responsibilities. These roles should be clearly defined, especially when one or more organizations offer similar services, to ensure that services are coordinated rather than duplicated.

Element in Action: Clarity of Roles and Responsibilities

Because the IELCE environmental services pre-apprenticeship program at the College of Western Idaho was a collaboration between many partners, it was important to clarify roles among the project team members and within their organizations. One partner developed a case study to highlight the pre-apprenticeship program, describe roles and responsibilities, and provide an artifact to sustain internal support for partners' roles. This clarity of roles and responsibilities was especially helpful when key roles at the hospital turned over. As a result of the case study documentation that clearly described roles, the project was able to weather changes and make staffing adjustments.

Communication and Transparency

Frequent and transparent communication holds a partnership together and keeps partners focused on common goals, activities, and progress. Communications include external communication, international communication among partner organizations, and internal communication with staff. External communication refers to how the partnership staff discuss their work with the public. Internal communication among partner organizations' designated staff helps partners remain invested and aware of the partnership tasks. Finally, communication about the partnership's work to internal audiences within the partner organizations refers to keeping leadership and staff within the IELCE organization informed and engaged in the partnership.

Implementation Suggestions:

- Set a regular meeting schedule with core partners to check in, co-plan, and address challenges and new opportunities for serving immigrants. Partners also should share regular updates about the partnership with internal and external networks.
- Agree in advance and in writing how the joint services or project will be described and branded in external communications, such as who will consistently receive credit for the project and whether all partners' logos should appear on project communications.

Element in Action: Communication and Transparency

The IELCE environmental services pre-apprenticeship program at the College of Western Idaho included several partners: a refugee resettlement agency, the Idaho Department of Labor, the adult education program at the College of Western Idaho, and a hospital employer partner. As a College of Western Idaho staff member stated, “Communication and transparency are the oxygen for the partnership and should not be shortchanged. When all three of these aspects of communication are attended to, then the partnership can thrive and even grow.” College staff used the following communication practices to develop the program and maintain an effective ongoing partnership:

- *Internal communication among the partner organizations’ designated staff:* Partners shared meeting notes and quarterly reports, which helped to keep all partner organizations informed of activities.
- *Internal communication within the partner organization:* For this project, internal communication included both the adult education program and the broader community college.
- *External communication about the partnership’s work:* External communications, such as an appearance on a local radio show, raised awareness of the project within the community, which ultimately helped to increase enrollment.

A Process for Tracking Progress and Outcomes

Tracking progress and outcomes can be challenging for many partnerships, especially if their joint work consists of direct services with specific or varying reporting requirements. Partners will need to determine how best to collect and aggregate data on joint service activities and track progress toward collective partnership goals.

Implementation Suggestions:

- Understand that solving the interoperability of data systems may be a long-term goal that will require interim work-arounds and solutions. For example, some partnerships use free cloud-based platforms, whereas others use customized software.
- Establish data sharing agreements to make it easier for partners to collaboratively share outcomes.

Element in Action: A Process for Tracking Progress and Outcomes

At Mankato Area Adult Basic Education in Minnesota, staff created a comprehensive flowchart to illustrate how data and outcomes are tracked across partnering adult education programs, including those of other adult education providers and workforce development members. This resource is updated annually and serves as a guide for new staff to learn about their roles within the larger data collection process. Staff also have students sign a release of information at their initial appointment and explain that the purpose of this release is to allow partners to analyze how they can make student experiences more seamless across organizations.

A Process for Decision-Making and Governance

More formal partnerships also need to consider how decisions will be made and who will be making them, including when to change course as challenges arise.

Implementation Suggestions:

- Consider a decision-making structure, such as identifying a steering committee to make decisions in consultation with the partnering agencies' leadership or developing a set of guiding principles or priorities for making decisions. Having an established decision-making process helps partnerships be prepared to take on opportunities that require additional planning and decision-making—for example, applying for funding together.
- Contact your state adult education agency to learn if your state has data matching agreements in place between the adult education system and other Workplace Innovation and Opportunity Act core partners. They may be able to support or broker data sharing agreements.

Allocation of Funding and Other Resources

As IELCE providers collaborate with partners in their efforts to support immigrant integration and inclusion, they should consider mapping resources to identify both existing funding streams and any gaps in funding. At that point, partnerships can employ their decision-making processes and methods for tracking progress to consider additional funding opportunities. Many partnerships operate without designated funding, whereas others team up to apply for funding for their joint work. In some states, funding to support consortia of adult education programs may also be available.

Implementation Suggestions:

- When funding is involved, partners need to draft agreements or contracts that outline the elements discussed above, such as roles, responsibilities, and data collection and reporting processes. Memoranda of Understanding are used typically when there are shared responsibilities but no shared funding.

Elements in Action: Decision-Making and Governance, and Allocation of Funding and Other Resources

California and Minnesota have funded formal partnership structures like consortia. In California, there are 71 Adult Education Regional Consortia, which each have designated leads and fiscal agents. The consortia include adult schools, community colleges, school districts, and workforce development boards. Each of the 71 consortia has an independent governing board that makes fiscal and consortia-wide decisions. Similarly, Minnesota funds 39 regional [Adult Basic Education Consortia](#), which include Minnesota school districts, Tribal nations, correctional system partners, and community-based organizations.

Conclusion

Partnership is essential for developing cohesive and holistic services for immigrants, including IELCE activities that promote immigrant integration and inclusion. The strategies described in this spotlight support the formation and ongoing maintenance of partnerships that are mutually beneficial for organizations and provide more streamlined, effective, or comprehensive services for adult learners.

Learn More

Understanding Partnerships for Immigrant Integration

- Explore [Adult Education and Immigrant Integration: Networks for Integrating New Americans, Theoretical Framework](#) to learn more about how collaborative partnerships can support immigrant integration.
- Read the [ALLIES Immigrant Integration Framework](#) to discover more examples of national, state, regional, and local collaborative efforts that support immigrant integration.
- Consider the multiple perspectives on the importance of partnerships in adult education in [Forum: The Power of Partnership](#), *Adult Literacy Journal* (Winter 2024).

Developing Key Partnerships for Immigrant Integration

- Take the LINCS online course, [Building Strategic Partnership: Engaging Employers](#), to learn more about building partnerships with employers.
- Review EARN's spotlight, [Adult Education and the Workforce Development System: Partnering to Improve Services](#), to learn more about partnering with American Job Centers, workforce development boards, and employers.
- Explore EARN's spotlight, [Expanding Boundaries: Taking a Regional Approach to IELCE/IET](#), to learn more about how partnerships among adult education programs can expand opportunities for adult learners across a region or state.

Designing IET and IELCE Programs with Partnerships in Mind

- Explore the Department of Labor's [Career Pathways Toolkit](#), which helps state and program teams develop, maintain, and enhance career pathways systems and programs. It includes resources that address partnership development to support career pathways programming.
- Review the [IET Design Toolkit](#), which includes the IET for English Learners Desk Aids. The Desk Aids provide extra considerations for developing IETs that are accessible for English learners.
- Check out the [IET Repository](#) for a curated collection of resources on partnerships for IET activities.