

>>> THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

*for the National Capital Region*

# **WORKFORCE ENGLISH**

This issue brief is part of a series examining major issues affecting immigrants and communities of color in the Washington, DC metropolitan region. It has been prepared for public officials, grantmakers, business leaders, community activists, and individuals who are seeking ways to build families and communities, and to improve the quality of life in the metropolitan Washington region.

*Workforce English: Strengthening Lives and the Region's Economy* is sponsored by The Community Foundation for the National Capital Region through the work of the Washington Area Partnership for Immigrants. Through the Partnership, the Foundation invests in community efforts that address critical issues impacting immigrant families, including access to quality education for children, language acquisition and workforce development, and the protection of the rights of laborers. This brief focuses on immigrant workers and opportunities to support their ability to contribute fully to our region's economy.

**The Community Foundation for the National Capital Region**

and its three regional affiliates—the Alexandria Community Trust, The Montgomery County Community Foundation, and The Prince George's Community Foundation—facilitate individual, family, and organizational giving at all levels to create a permanent source of philanthropic capital to improve the quality of life in the metropolitan Washington region. The Foundation connects its donors to organizations providing impactful programs; serves as a convener and catalyst on emerging issues; and provides sound financial management of assets. The Foundation plays a leadership role in helping to create change on critical issues pertaining to equity, access, and opportunity for our region's communities.

**The Washington Area Partnership for Immigrants** was established in 1998 to help immigrants obtain U.S. citizenship. This funding collaborative has developed into a strong leadership group of local philanthropic and government representatives that play an important role in the development of emerging immigrant leadership and in the protection of human rights. The Partnership's goals include building awareness amongst community stakeholders of critical issues impacting immigrant communities, building the capacity of immigrant-serving community-based organizations, strengthening the ability of community organizations and immigrant networks to work collaboratively, and building regional infrastructure to support immigrant advocacy efforts.



## **STRENGTHENING LIVES**

>>> AND THE REGION'S ECONOMY

## >>> Forward and Introduction

by Terri Lee Freeman,  
President of The Community  
Foundation for the  
National Capital Region

The highly charged issue of immigrants in this country is in the spotlight as never before—citizens are calling for comprehensive immigration policies, politicians are deeply divided, and recent immigrants are nervously waiting to see how the outcomes from this debate will affect their lives. Through the din, two messages are clear—this country's successes have been made possible with the help of immigrants and foreign born individuals who now comprise an essential part of our region's workforce.

The Washington, DC region is considered a new immigrant gateway. The Brookings Institution has reported that unlike traditional gateway cities for immigrants, like New York and Chicago, immigrants only recently began coming to the region. Our foreign-born population grew by 70 percent—nearly 350,000 during the 1990s. Approximately 40 percent of these immigrants are from Latin America or the Caribbean and in some area jurisdictions—including Arlington, Alexandria, and Montgomery County—more than one-quarter of the population are immigrants.<sup>1</sup>

During this time, the region has also experienced strong economic growth, growing faster than the nation as a whole and

more than other metropolitan urban areas in job growth—with almost 90,000 new jobs in 2005 alone. It also has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country. The number of jobs is projected to keep increasing: the Council of Governments estimates that by 2030 we will have 4.2 million jobs, nearly 50 percent increase, yet at a slightly higher rate of growth than both population and households. Employment growth is the greatest now, during the 2005 to 2010 time period, when an average of 64,000 new jobs are anticipated per year.<sup>2</sup>

Yet there are risks in these numbers. One of the biggest risks to this region's success is income equality—those not in the mainstream of the knowledge economy falling increasingly behind. Demographic shifts and continuing technological advances will also have enormous consequences for workforce development. But the greatest threats to the area's economy include labor force quality and quantity.

Not surprisingly, some of the greatest growth is occurring in the service, hospitality, healthcare, construction, and landscaping industries—the very sectors that are increasingly staffed by new immigrants. For these workers, language is often a true barrier to learning new skills—being able to work productively and confidently,



becoming vested in their work-places and communities, and ultimately building resilient families. While time in the U.S. and work experience reduce the share of workers who are limited English proficient, the Urban Institute found that 29 percent of workers who have been in the country for 20 years or more can still be considered limited English proficient.<sup>3</sup>

If the English language and vocational skills of low-income immigrants can be improved, this will certainly help prepare them for placement and advancement in key job growth areas, allow for greater economic self-sufficiency, motivate individuals to seek additional educational opportunities for themselves and their family members, and facilitate greater communication and understanding between cultural groups. This link between education and employment—between acquisition of English language skills,

job placement, and personal security—must be addressed by employers, civic leaders, philanthropists, and community activists in order to ensure our region’s continued growth and the economic self-sufficiency of our newest residents.

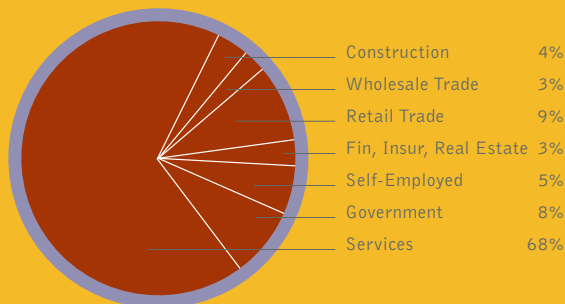
We are very fortunate that there are vital community-based organizations throughout the Washington, DC region addressing the English-proficiency needs of Latino and immigrant communities through language instruction, interview practice, vocational training, and job placement. On these pages, you will learn about five extraordinary organizations that have received grants from to Washington Area Partnership for Immigrants to address Workforce English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)—Casa of Maryland, Inc., Community Services Agency, Herndon Dulles Chamber of

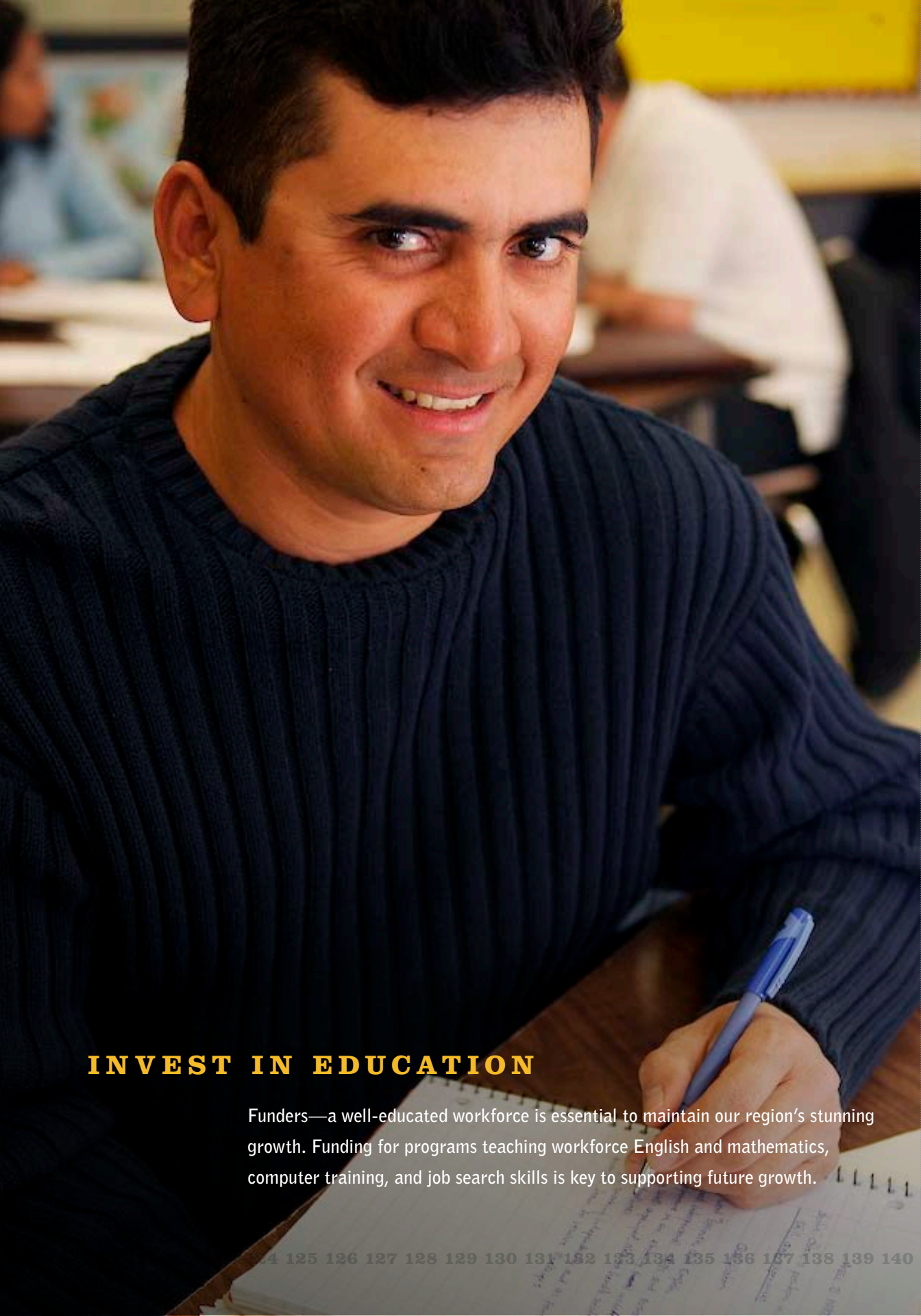


Commerce, Montgomery Coalition for Adult Literacy and ESOL, and Northern Virginia Family Service. Combined, their efforts are allowing immigrants who have been trained in their countries to build on existing skills and obtain secure employment. It is our hope that this issue brief will draw attention to these critical issues and the nonprofits that are helping to strengthen the lives of individuals and, in doing so, building one of the nation’s largest and most capable workforces.

**>>> Industry Shares of 2000–2030 Growth**

*Metropolitan Washington Council on Governments, 2005*





## **INVEST IN EDUCATION**

Funders—a well-educated workforce is essential to maintain our region's stunning growth. Funding for programs teaching workforce English and mathematics, computer training, and job search skills is key to supporting future growth.

“Maryland ranks tenth among states of intended residence by immigrants admitted to the country and is considered one of the most diverse states in the nation. Ten percent of Maryland’s 5.5 million residents are immigrants and 34 percent are from Latin America. Immigrant workers are highly represented in the fields of private household services, farming, and construction. However, this hiring surge has not translated into wage growth. Weekly earnings for most workers, especially immigrants remain stagnant or have decreased as the cost of living has increased. Maryland’s high rate of economic growth presents a great opportunity to develop policies to ensure that all Maryland workers benefit.”

*—Equality Works: Protecting Low-Wage Workers in the State of Maryland from the Maryland Latino Coalition for Justice*

**>>> CASA of Maryland, Inc.**

Gustavo Torres, Executive Director  
301.270.0419 / [www.casademaryland.org](http://www.casademaryland.org)

CASA of Maryland is a community organization that was founded in 1985 by Central American refugees and North Americans in response to the needs of thousands of Central Americans who were arriving in the DC area after fleeing wars and civil strife in their countries of origin. The organization has evolved from focusing primarily on direct service provision to refugees to providing a wide range of educational, organizing, and advocacy activities designed to address the multiple conditions of poverty and disenfranchisement that control the lives of many Latino immigrants and refugees. CASA achieves its goals through programs in areas such as leadership, organizing, women’s empowerment, tenant support, employment, legal services, health, education, social services, and immigration assistance.

English classes comprise the largest component of CASA’s education program, including “La Raza is Learning English,” an initiative that promotes access to workforce-related language instruction for day laborers and domestic workers. These classes, which have been developed specifically to their needs and are offered at no cost—use a specialized curriculum to teach basic workplace English and knowledge about employment in areas such as painting, plumbing, brick laying, demolition, and certain health-related fields. Classes also cover rights and responsibilities in the workplace and promote community involvement and leadership. In the initiative’s first year, 340 students participated, with 35 continuing on to more advanced ESOL training. The organization also placed 128 individuals in permanent jobs paying a living wage through its Educational Placement Program and ESOL courses. Overall, CASA of Maryland enrolled 950 limited-English proficient individuals in seven separate levels of ESOL classes with its first year of funding from the Washington Area Partnership for Immigrants.

"Above all, we need to work hard on becoming a more inclusive region, less divided by race and income, a better example of a region with opportunities for all. If we build on our strengths and implement our values we can have a National Capital Region of which we and the rest of the nation can be proud."

—Alice Rivlin, *The Brookings Institution*

### >>> **Community Services Agency**

Kathleen McKirchey, Executive Director  
202.857.0480 / [www.dclabor.org](http://www.dclabor.org)

The Community Services Agency (CSA) is the nonprofit service arm of the region's AFL-CIO that offers assistance to union members and their families and operates educational and training programs throughout the area.

Because the ability to use math is one of the key requirements for a successful career in the building and construction trades, CSA recently developed a VESL (Vocational English as a Second Language) math survey to assess English language and math training skills among local building and construction trades apprenticeship programs. In helping new immigrants, the agency observed that apprentices and apprenticeship applicants were not only facing the challenge of learning a new language, they needed to learn mathematical terms in English and understand how math is done in the United States. The survey results helped CSA develop a new educational program and write an occupationally-based math curriculum, *Speaking of Math*, that met the needs of as many trades as possible, including Asbestos Workers Local 24, Ironworkers Local 5, and Sheet Metal Workers Local 100.

The course work is participatory and project-based, combining a review of trades math skills with the language needed to talk about math and also to function safely and efficiently on the job. During the pilot and post-pilot phase, the curriculum improved competence in math and vocational English for 42 students, all of whom are native Spanish speakers with low English proficiency. Community Services Agency also incorporated a two-part pre-/post-course learner assessment into the program and created opportunities for evaluation of a student's progress by the instructor, peers, and the learner himself.

Through *Speaking of Math* efforts, the Community Services Agency has succeeded in building a consortium of trade unions working on VESL issues, allowing for an unprecedented level of cooperation around education that is helping all stakeholders succeed.



## **ENCOURAGE COLLABORATION**

Organizations—linking service providers, community colleges, trade unions, and businesses is an effective strategy to providing seamless workforce development. Collaboration between groups creates a resource network for both individuals seeking training and employers seeking skilled workers.



## **TRAIN VOLUNTEERS**

Communities—building capacity for workforce training is a priority for individuals in addition to organizations. Training ESOL volunteers in the broader community leverages increased capacity and has a multiplier effect on organizational effectiveness.

“Immigrants are crucial to the maintenance and growth of the U.S. workforce. Strategies and models that improve the skills of these new entrants to the workforce—and that streamline their ability to keep pace with changes in industry and to succeed in higher-wage, more skilled jobs—make sound economic sense.”

—*Educating the Immigrant Workforce: An Overview of Practice in the Manufacturing Industry from Jobs for the Future*

### >>> Herndon Dulles Chamber of Commerce

Eileen Curtis, President & CEO  
703.437.5556 / [www.herndondulleschamber.org](http://www.herndondulleschamber.org)

The Herndon Dulles Chamber of Commerce promotes and facilitates the success of businesses and the communities they serve through networking, outreach, advocacy, and education. In recent years, the Herndon area has been home to one of the fastest growing immigrant populations in the region. From 1990 to 2000, Hispanic residents in Herndon increased from eight percent to approximately 33 percent. The Chamber's work has kept pace—a Hispanic Business Council has been launched that works with Hispanic entrepreneurs, staff have hosted multicultural summits to analyze growth challenges and document suggested solutions, and the Chamber remains focused on three significant issues affecting their community—the day laborer population, gang violence, and overcrowded homes in the neighborhoods.

In order to help non-English speaking workers better assimilate into the community, the Chamber's leadership determined that it was a priority to recruit and train qualified ESOL volunteers so that more language classes could be offered. As a result, the Chamber collaborated with Fairfax County Schools' Office of Adult and Community Education, Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC), and the Town of Herndon to train volunteer teachers of English and offer vocational ESOL programs for individuals interested in landscaping and construction. The training begins with a “Train the Trainers” curriculum and is followed by trade-specific instruction in construction ESOL (a 24-class hour program) and landscaping (20-class hours). Twenty-three trainees graduated in the first year, and eight are set to graduate from the advanced training program. The next phase of courses and training will include workers in the hospitality and health care fields, as well as food preparation.

Some class graduates have gone on to internships and help the NVCC faculty co-teach the *ESOL for Construction Workers* class, which is open to all non-native English-speaking members of the community. As Linda Malami, director of Continuing Education and Workforce Development at NVCC stated, “This project has the potential to positively impact the employment prospects of recent immigrants who have chosen to live in this community, and I hope its success will serve as a model that other Chambers will replicate.”

“Twenty-one percent of the Washington, metropolitan region’s population communicates in non-English languages at home and 43 percent of the area’s foreign-born population is limited English proficient.”

—*Polyglot Washington: Language Needs and Abilities in the Nation’s Capital, The Brookings Institution*

### >>> **Montgomery Coalition for Adult Literacy and ESOL**

Mary Freeman, NEED TITLE  
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The Montgomery Coalition for Adult Literacy and ESOL is a community organization committed to increasing the resources, quantity, and quality of adult English language instruction, while ensuring that the instruction is relevant to an optimal labor force and quality of life. Established by Montgomery College’s Workforce Development and Continuing Education office in 2004, the coalition provides training to volunteer adult ESOL teachers and offers a 10-week, 30-hour course for professional adult ESOL teachers.

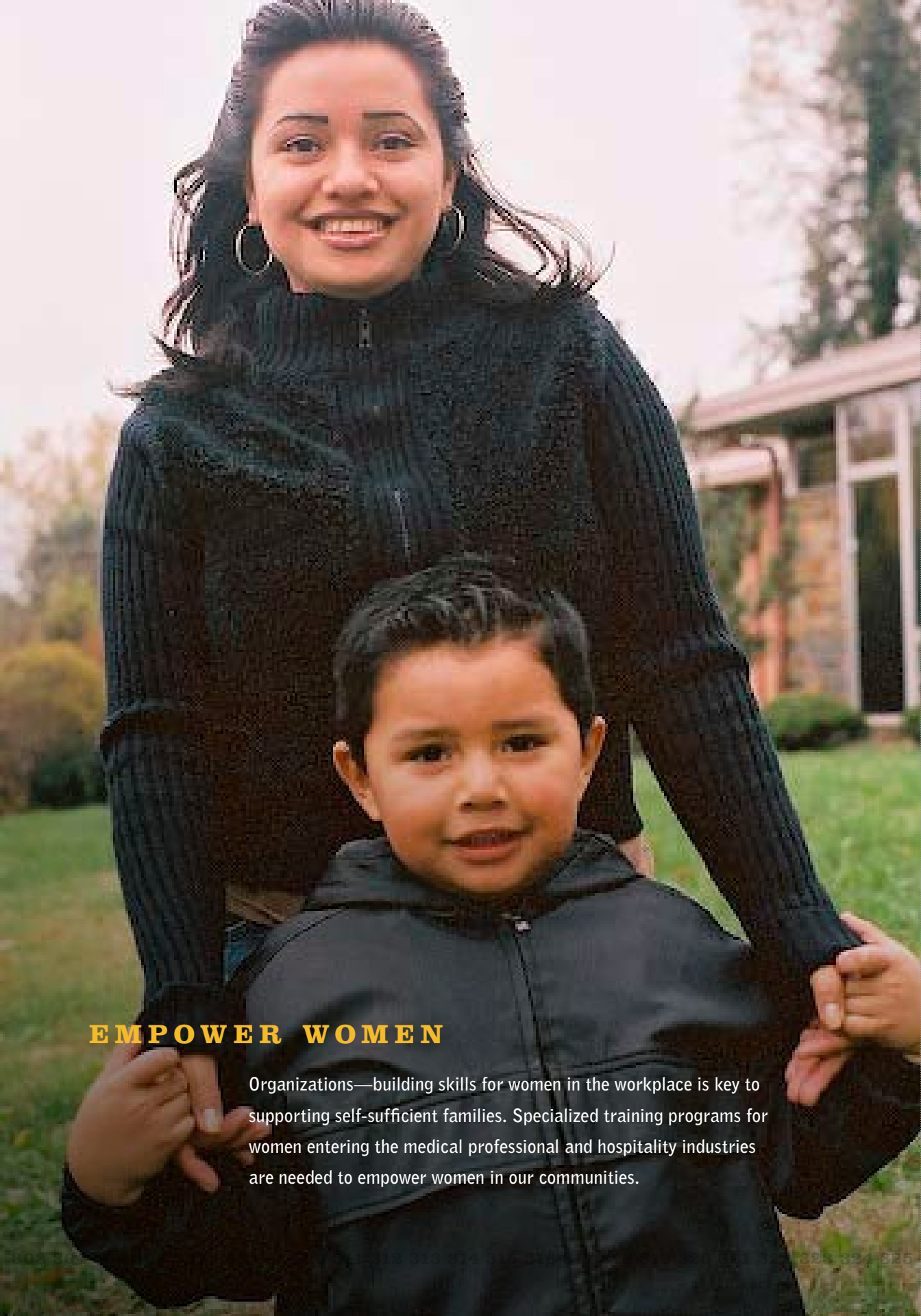
The coalition also supports 42 community and faith-based groups that offer adult literacy and ESOL services, including an in-house education institute for employees at Adventist Health Care; training in computers, air conditioning, plumbing, and electrical with contextual English at Centro de Capacitacion Profesional; and ESOL, GED, and exit counseling for job placement at Montgomery County Corrections and Rehabilitation. Through its activities, the coalition is working to increase access and capacity to quality programs, create standards for teaching and testing, enhancing students’ economic self-sufficiency, and addressing local workforce development needs. In its first year, the organization tracked a 25 percent increase in the number of individuals registering for ESOL classes in Montgomery County—from 23,800 to 30,922 students.

Adult education learners, defined by the state as being 16 or older, without a high school diploma and/or who have little or no English skills, make up 22 percent of Maryland’s adult population. Although the coalition is young, its vision is strong—that every adult resident of Montgomery County has the English literacy skills necessary to be self-sufficient or has ready access to acquiring those skills, every adult resident has access to employment opportunity and self-sufficiency; and all local businesses have access to an English-literate workforce.



## **BUILD CONFIDENCE**

Employers—support education that empowers individuals. Building workforce English and other skills has the added effect of building the confidence that is key for success and self-sufficiency.



## **EMPOWER WOMEN**

Organizations—building skills for women in the workplace is key to supporting self-sufficient families. Specialized training programs for women entering the medical professional and hospitality industries are needed to empower women in our communities.

“Even though a college education remains the surest ticket to long-term self-sufficiency, community-based training providers typically are not connected with higher education systems. Because of these systemic disconnects, graduates of community-based training programs face barriers to continuing their education. Without continuing their educations they jeopardize long-term career success and risk falling back into low-wage, dead-end jobs. Together, NOVA and NVFS have joined their resources to create a job-training pipeline that produces immediate job skills and employment opportunity together will the sustainable benefits of a college education.”

—Robert G. Templin, Jr., President, Northern Virginia Community College

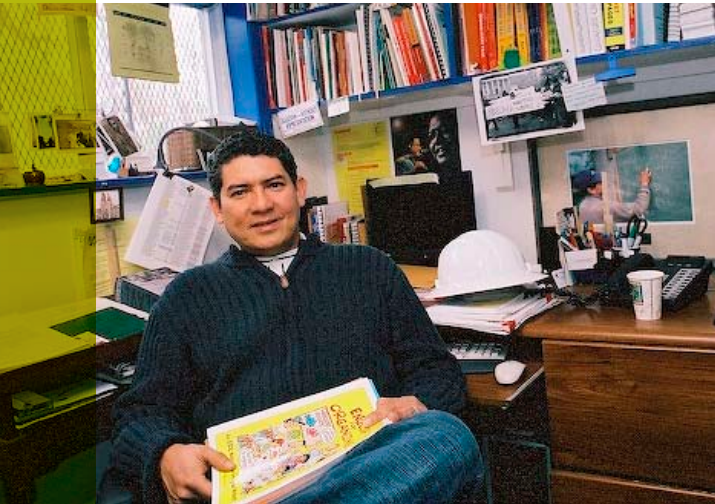
### >>> Northern Virginia Family Service

Bill Browning, Manager of Training Programs  
703.913.5478 / [www.nvfs.org](http://www.nvfs.org)

Northern Virginia Family Service (NVFS) offers comprehensive services to help 24,000 vulnerable low-income and immigrant clients in Northern Virginia find new paths to self-reliance. The organization helps families obtain affordable health care, quality childcare, housing, financial and life counseling, workforce development, and foster care.

Training Futures is a NVFS training program that brings together low-income Northern Virginia adults who want a better life for their families through better jobs with area businesses that need administrative staff with strong technological skills. The Training Futures program enrolls 140 low-income trainees annually at two sites, the majority of whom are immigrants. Through its 22-week design, Training Futures prepares graduates for a variety of entry-level office jobs, including administrative assistant, customer service, receptionist, accounting clerk, and data entry.

Recently, NVFS' Training Futures program has been partnering with Northern Virginia Community College's (NVCC) Medical Education Campus to leverage its health care ESOL resources. Together, they are offering a curriculum that features three NVCC modules: medical terminology, HIPPA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability) confidentiality, and medical office procedures/billing. The collaboration is creating a new pathway for immigrants who may have been turned away from training opportunities due to limited language skills and is providing a pipeline of health care workers to fill high-demand health care jobs. Training Futures trainees consistently achieve 90 percent graduation rates, 90 percent employment success, and \$6,000/year immediate wage gains.



### >>> Recommendations

The groups profiled in these pages—educators, businesses, unions, and community and faith organizations—are coming together to create more opportunities for English language instruction for workers. These programs benefit employers and employees, taxpayers, and the regional economy. Low-income families are able to be a part of the economic mainstream and transition from public assistance to making contributions in their communities.

Nationwide, immigrant workers currently number over 20 million, or 14 percent of the total U.S. workforce. They are crucial to the maintenance and growth of

that workforce—immigrants are projected to account for half of the working-age population growth between 2006 and 2015 and all the growth between 2016 and 2035. Because so many of these immigrants have little or no English proficiency and may have low degrees of literacy in their own language, the challenges of successfully integrating them into the workforce are great.

Yet there are not enough workforce ESOL initiatives in place to meet the need, organizers would benefit from more coordinated efforts and collaboration, and there must be greater investment in our region's workforce training needs. There are many opportunities for funders

and decision makers to help strengthen lives and the region's economy through workforce ESOL.

Strategic investments in workforce ESOL with the goal of strengthening family functioning and economic well-being are urgently needed across our region. Through its work in this field, The Washington Area Partnership for Immigrants concurs with recent findings of Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees and The Annie E. Casey Foundation's *Supporting English Language Acquisition: Opportunities for Foundations to Strengthen the Social and Economic Well-Being of Immigrant Families*. It includes the following considerations for funders:

To help relatively well-educated Limited English Proficient adults learn English:

- Teach workplace English vocabulary, with many courses focusing on vocabulary that is used in a specific industry or occupation (e.g., construction, nursing, or childcare).
- Teach basic computer skills and soft skills that help participants find and retain jobs, including job search, resume writing and interviewing; customs and norms in the U.S. workplace; and effective communication with co-workers.
- Offer basic training to help participants obtain credentials or pass entrance tests to work in specific occupations.
- Provide job counseling and placement services to help participants find employment after completing the program.

For immigrants with low levels of education:

English acquisition should be coupled with comprehensive trainings in basic literacy and math skills. One promising approach is to integrate English instruction into basic adult education courses or job training programs. The design of such programs depends on the characteristics of the targeted population, the conditions of the local employment market for lower-skill workers, and the specific program goals. Funders considering support for these programs should ask the following general questions:

- How does the proposed English acquisition program address the targeted population's educational and job skill needs?
- What are the economic and employment trends in the

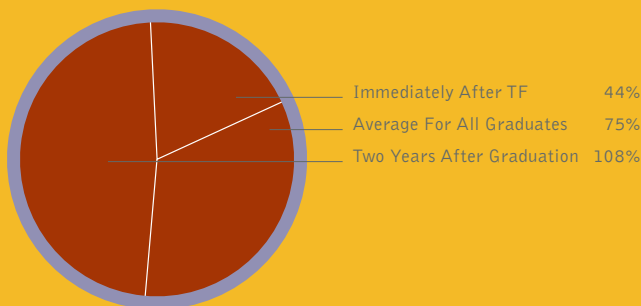
area, and what are opportunities for Limited English Proficient job seekers in the local job market?

- In addition to English and vocational training, what other types of employment services are needed to ensure positive outcomes for the target population?
- Does providing these services require collaboration among multiple service providers and what kinds of organizations are best positioned to provide services?

Additionally, funders should also invest in mechanisms to help alleviate family and social pressures of program participants, including case management, emergency child care, and other family-based services needed to help individuals complete their training and find employment.

>>> **Graduates' Increase In Earnings After TF**

*Trickle Up: A Case Study on Community Benefits of Workforce Development*



## >>> Conclusion

The ongoing national debate on immigration has created a challenging environment for funders to operate in. The shifting sands of legislation and impact of public policy on immigrant communities underlines the importance of real and periodic dialogue with essential stakeholders. In July of 2006, The Partnership convened dozens of representatives of local immigrant-serving community based organizations, Partnership grantees, thought leaders, and community stakeholders for a broad-based discussion of the most important issues facing immigrant communities in our region. The discussion

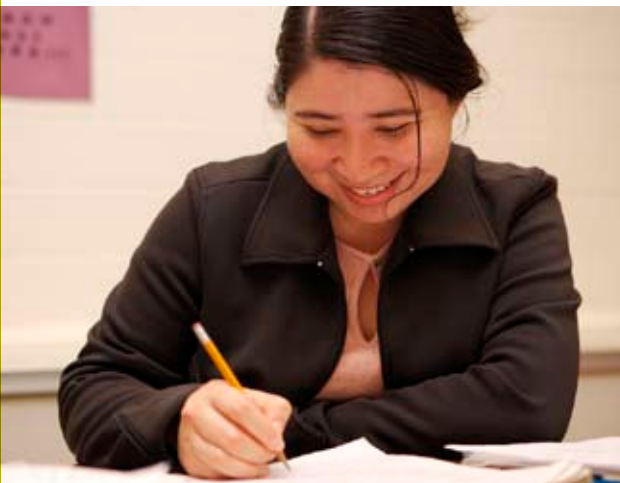
affirmed the need for sustained philanthropic support of workforce ESOL programs and initiatives in the greater Washington region.

Participants also identified areas of future investment—issues currently facing ESOL providers and program participants that warrant a closer look by funders. Systemic change around documentation issues, translating existing skills and credentials into jobs through an expedited process for foreign workers with advanced training or degrees, and building awareness amongst employers of critical issues impacting immigrant workers were key areas identified by dialogue participants.



Through an ongoing dialogue with grantees and community stakeholders, The Partnership has recognized the great impact that policymakers and grant-makers can have on our region's working families. Through strategic investment in programs linking the development of English skills to job placement, investment in partnerships between nonprofits, community colleges, and trade unions, and investment in regional advocacy infrastructure, we can create opportunities for the men and women who make up the emerging bedrock of our region's economy.

In the midst of the current national debate on immigration, these findings challenge us to both acknowledge and honor the vision of success our region's immigrants are pursuing, and invest philanthropic and public resources in creating a roadmap that supports this vision.







1201 15th Street, NW  
Suite 420  
Washington, DC 20005

T. 202.955.5890  
F. 202.955.8084

[www.cfncr.org](http://www.cfncr.org)

*There are more than 832,000 new immigrants residing in the Metropolitan Washington, DC region and this number will continue to grow. We must help area immigrants build resilient lives and create strategies to ensure they can be a productive part of our region's economy.*