

Synergy ready to be harnessed

In 2019, the City of Tulsa applied to be a part of the Skilled Immigrant Integration Program (SIIP), an initiative of WES Global Talent Bridge, in partnership with YWCA Tulsa, Green Country Workforce, Tulsa Community College, and the Tulsa Regional Chamber, among others. The SIIP application was part of the city's response to the rapid growth of Tulsa's immigrant population – U.S. Census Data indicated that 27% of the city's population growth from 2010 to 2015 was attributable to immigrants; the application built upon a two-year multisector effort to promote immigrant inclusion in employment, education, and civic affairs. The New Tulsans Initiative (NTI) was launched in 2017. This multi-partner effort included a summit with over 100 stakeholders and multiple cross-sector subcommittees, resulting in the 2018 release of the city's New Tulsans' Welcoming Plan.

Given the alignment of the goals of the New Tulsans' Welcoming Plan with those of SIIP, Tulsa proposed to focus its SIIP efforts on the implementation of the economic development goals of the Welcoming Plan. Specifically, Tulsa sought to utilize SIIP to advance credential recognition for immigrants who hold international credentials; to educate employers and workforce providers on best practices for serving and employing immigrants; and to foster awareness of employment opportunities and career pathways.

While many Tulsa organizations were already engaged in the New Tulsans Initiative, SIIP provided a structure for strengthening the partnership and coalescing around specific actions to implement the Welcoming Plan. As the SIIP work moved forward, a core group of partners evolved into Flourish Tulsa, a network housed within the Mayor's Office of Resilience and Equity. In addition to the Mayor's Office, the network includes Partner Tulsa, Tulsa Community College, YWCA Tulsa, the Tulsa Regional Chamber of Commerce, Green Country Workforce, the Uma Center of Tulsa, and World Education Services (WES). Flourish Tulsa aimed to provide resources and connections for internationally educated immigrants to find pathways to employment and for employers to capitalize on the skills and talents of immigrants.

The SIIP Partners

- Mayor's Office of Resilience and Equity (MORE), City of Tulsa
- Partner Tulsa (formerly Mayor's Office of Economic Development)
- YWCA Tulsa
- Green Country Workforce
- Tulsa Community College
- Tulsa Regional
- Uma Center of Tulsa

SIIP Goals

- Develop training material and resources on credential evaluation and recognition
- Develop career pathway guides for internationally educated immigrants
- Support and train service provider staff and Green Country Workforce in working with immigrants educated abroad

"I really appreciated the thoughtfulness the whole team put into where the pieces fit. Everyone has good intentions but it's easy to get distracted. Through this partnership, we have really been able to keep the focus."

Propelling education and action

With the help of SIIP, Flourish Tulsa made stakeholders aware of immigrant talent in the city, educated providers and employers about working with this population, and provided guidance to internationally trained immigrants. Through partnerships with the Tulsa Community College ESL Program and American Immigration Council, Flourish Tulsa obtained data on the internationally educated population in Tulsa: who they are and the skills they bring. Possessing a clearer picture of the population helped Flourish Tulsa elevate the conversation across employers, workforce service providers, and other stakeholders about the value immigrants educated abroad bring to Tulsa. It also enabled Flourish Tulsa to direct attention to the credential recognition and service needs of internationally educated immigrants.

In partnership with WES Global Talent Bridge, Flourish Tulsa hosted webinars for employers to learn more about validating international credentials, the visa process, and resources available to employers to support immigrants as employees. Flourish Tulsa and WES Global Talent Bridge also co-hosted a webinar for immigrants to learn how to get their international credentials evaluated and about local services available to support their career goals. Additionally, Flourish Tulsa partnered with Upwardly Global, a technical assistance provider and active member of the SIIP team, to train local service providers on integrating internationally trained immigrants into the local workforce.

Flourish Tulsa charted a pathway for immigrants to access the education, credentialing, and services they need to return to their original fields of work. The pathway options appear on the Flourish Tulsa website via short videos showcasing the steps immigrants can take to re-enter their careers.

In addition to data resources and assistance with webinars, Flourish Tulsa benefited from the guidance of experts at WES Global Talent Bridge and the experience of peer SIIP communities around the country. For example, Tulsa is

“One of the big takeaways of SIIP was just starting the conversations about the internationally trained immigrant population that currently exists in Tulsa. We had heard a lot anecdotally but we were still lacking the data.”

Opportunities for Internationally Trained Immigrants

- Access to resources on credential assessment and recognition
- Pathways for education, training, and placement assistance via multiple partners
- Networking opportunities via the Chamber’s Mosaic coalition

“I work with clients directly; the common theme I hear is the feeling that they're not stuck anymore. They have more hope and motivation to do what they want to do, and they're really grateful for this program.”

considering a “connectors program” to help internationally trained immigrants grow their professional network, following a model that the SIIP alum site in Portland, Maine has successfully implemented.

Building on the foundation: The future of Flourish Tulsa

Since the SIIP cohort year ended in June 2021, Flourish Tulsa has met regularly to work on behalf of internationally trained immigrants. The partnership has continued to educate employers and service providers, provide more resources and information to immigrants and refugees, host training and education events, and pursue collaborative funding opportunities.

Flourish Tulsa has recently hosted forums for human resource specialists on how to hire and integrate immigrants and refugees into the workplace. In the spring of 2022, Green Country Workforce hosted a half-day event where employers presented to other employers how to work with specific populations of employees, including immigrants and refugees.

Expanding on its pathways for immigrants, Flourish Tulsa is working on finalizing pathway guides in three industries: engineering, behavioral health, and education. These fields were prioritized based on data accessed through the Tulsa Community College ESL Program. To promote the guides once they are finalized, Flourish Tulsa plans to host events featuring panels of individuals from these fields; the panels will be followed by networking opportunities.

Tulsa partners see continued opportunities to build on the foundation of the SIIP experience, collaborating across workforce providers and other nonprofits, employers, educational institutions, and the city to serve the immigrant community for the benefit of the community.

SIIP’s Contribution

- External reflection, guidance, and technical assistance
- Co-hosting webinars and training sessions
- Experience of peers and alumni sites

“The timing was perfect because of the transition with Afghan parolees coming into the community. We have been able to leverage what we have done with this group to bring in other resources and partners to serve Afghan parolees.”

“There is going to be continued integration, continued communication, and more partnerships between workforce and educational institutions and nonprofits. I am hoping that those collaborations will bring more funding to what we are doing because we are starting to show that we have multiple partners with lots of credibility and good results and still a lot of work to do.”