

Global Pathways for a Thriving Rural Workforce

Rural Policy Symposium: Summary



March 2024

Background

On March 8, 2024, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, the U.S. Department of State, and partnering organizations held the rural policy symposium, *Global Pathways for a Thriving Rural Workforce*, at the Pennsylvania College of Technology in Williamsport. This summary provides an overview of the plenary and concurrent sessions for this symposium. Speakers shared state, national, and world perspectives and information on engaging the international workforce in rural communities.

Opening remarks were provided by: Dr. Michael Reed, President, Pennsylvania College of Technology; Senator Gene Yaw, Chairman, Center for Rural Pennsylvania Board of Directors; and Michael Hackett, Foreign Service Officer, U.S. Department of State.

Plenary Session 1: What You Need to Know About Visas and the Federal Government

**Morgan O'Brien, Industry Liaison,
U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs**
O'Brien emphasized the need for the federal government to connect directly with communities across the nation, including rural communities. He highlighted the significance of visas in promoting travel, tourism, student enrollment, and workforce and economic development in both urban and rural areas.

O'Brien discussed the following types of visas and their contributions:

Student Visas (F-1 and M-1):

- Facilitate the influx of international students.
- Contribute to a \$32 billion industry in international education.

Work Visas (H-2A, H-2B, H-1B):

- Fill labor gaps in various sectors, such as agriculture, hospitality, and technology.
- Boost workforce diversity and skills.

Exchange Visas (J-1):

- Promote intercultural exchange and understanding.
- Facilitate temporary visits to the U.S. and abroad.
- Enhance workforce staffing shortages.

O'Brien discussed how visas strengthen the American workforce, particularly in the face of population decline. He discussed how visas and international exchange promote cultural diplomacy and mutual understanding. Additionally, he explained how visas enhance economic growth and innovation, especially in rural areas. O'Brien explained new post-pandemic initiatives for the visa office, such as focusing on improving visa processes, public engagement, and efforts to reduce wait times, and provide personalized assistance. He introduced a new resource for direct inquiries regarding visa concerns, called



Pictured (L-R): Senator Gene Yaw, Chairman, Center for Rural Pennsylvania; Dr. Kyle Kopko, Executive Director, Center for Rural Pennsylvania; Dr. Michael Reed, President, Pennsylvania College of Technology.

the Business Visa Center and provided a direct email contact at BusinessVisa@state.gov. This new initiative will be utilized as a means of direct contact if in-person services are not timely or available. In conclusion, O'Brien emphasized the importance of inclusive foreign policy that benefits all communities. He acknowledged the significant impact of visas on the U.S. workforce, higher education institutions, cultural diversity, and economic growth. Visas provide the opportunity for enhancing international exchange, and new initiatives are being implemented to enhance visa processes.



Pictured: Morgan O'Brien, Industry Liason, U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs.

Concurrent Session 1: Health Care

***Lisa Stevenson, Esq., Senior Associate Counsel,
Corporate Legal Department, UPMC***

The healthcare panel discussed the complexities of recruiting international medical professionals, presenting both challenges and opportunities. Stevenson discussed how getting a visa for a foreign worker can be challenging. She emphasized that businesses should consider using an attorney specializing in immigration and visa issues. She mentioned that UPMC has been very successful in recruiting foreign physicians. Many of these physicians that they have recruited remain at the same location for many years due to the beneficial quality of life in rural communities.

***Dana Wucinski, Esq., Board Counsel,
Pennsylvania Department of State Boards of Medicine
and Osteopathic Medicine***

Wucinski explained that the Pennsylvania Boards of Medicine and Osteopathic Medicine are charged with the health and safety of Pennsylvanians through the licensing of both national and international medical professionals. There are several licensing differences between Pennsylvania and international medical institutions. The Boards are willing to work with institutions (hospitals, medical centers, etc.) to navigate licensing procedures. Stakeholders can contact the Board Counsel with any questions or concerns regarding licensing procedures related to international medical professionals by emailing DWucinski@pa.gov.

***Dr. Ed Naugle, Director, Primary Care Office,
Pennsylvania Department of Health***

Dr. Naugle expressed that there are different types of health professional shortage areas and medically under-

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served areas in Pennsylvania. Some federal programs prioritize recruiting physicians and other medical professionals to aid in medical staffing shortages and underserved areas. Some of these programs have caps on the number of physicians they can recruit, while other federal programs do not.

***Dr. Whitfield Dwight Lewis, Physician,
UPMC Altoona***

Dr. Lewis shared that rural hospitals and other medical providers should remember that many foreign physicians were born and raised in small communities. This gives these institutions a built-in advantage in recruitment. Foreign professionals being recruited are often looking for a welcoming community for themselves and their families. These professionals are looking for a good community to raise their families in over the long term. Dr. Lewis shared his personal story of being sponsored on a J-1 visa to work as a doctor at UPMC Altoona. Dr. Lewis and his family currently reside in Altoona and enjoy living in the area.

As healthcare providers strive to address workforce shortages and provide quality care, collaborative efforts between government agencies, legal experts, and healthcare providers remain crucial in navigating the complexities of international recruitment and licensure, ultimately ensuring the workforce and the health and safety of communities across Pennsylvania.



Pictured (L-R): Lisa Stevenson, Esq.; Dana Wucinski, Esq.; Dr. Edward Naugle; Dr. Whitfield Dwight Lewis.

Government Offices, Partnerships, and International Corporations

***David Briel, Deputy Secretary,
Office of International Business Development,
Pennsylvania Department of Community and
Economic Development***

Briel discussed DCED's international business development strategy, as a two-fold strategy. Briel explained that the first part focuses on ensuring that businesses have the necessary infrastructure to establish themselves effectively. Additionally, the second part focuses on workforce development. He noted the importance of this aspect, particularly in terms of matching job roles with available skilled workers. Briel discussed workforce concerns, raising the question of whether there are enough skilled individuals to fill the job roles being offered by companies. Briel shared insight on the financial resources DCED provides, such as financing to assist businesses and international companies in Pennsylvania. However, this support becomes irrelevant if there are not enough

workers to sustain the businesses. The Shapiro Administration and DCED's Office of International Business Development are working together through a series of "Bringing the World to PA" events to attract and establish global businesses and companies in the Commonwealth.

**Steven Stumbris, Director,
Small Business Development Center,
Bucknell University**

Stumbris shared the role and focus of the Small Business Development Center (SBDC). SBDCs play an intermediary role, serving as connectors between local communities, state agencies, and federal government agencies. He discussed how they provide entrepreneurial support, such as guidance and assistance, to entrepreneurs at various stages, from startup to growth, with a focus on addressing the evolving needs of businesses. They offer support to entrepreneurs transitioning into employers, including advice on aspects like payroll management. Stumbris illustrated the effectiveness of SBDC support through examples of local businesses that have successfully grown with their assistance, such as Ayana Active and Susquehanna Fire Equipment Company. He noted SBDCs' implementation of post-COVID adaptations, such as recognizing the increasing significance of businesses having an online presence and the role SBDCs play in facilitating this transition.

Panel Q&A discussion noted the changing landscape of human resources, particularly in response to demographic shifts and the increasing diversity of the workforce. Additionally, they discussed the importance of supporting immigrant contributions and providing assistance to address traditional barriers to employment. Highlighted was the role of immigrants in bringing diverse experiences and ideas to the workforce, particularly in the restaurant and hospitality industries. In conclusion, this panel covered aspects of international business development strategies, SBDC support initiatives and resources, and workforce dynamics and employment policies.

**Higher Education and International Students
Nic Cervantes, Director,
U.S. Commercial Service Harrisburg,
U.S. Department of Commerce**

Cervantes, representing the U.S. Commercial Service Harrisburg, shed light on the pivotal role played by international students in the export and import dynamics of education. He discussed that international students are not just a demographic, but a significant aspect of the national export strategy, promoting the United States as a premier study destination in the world. Cervantes added that their presence translates into a substantial financial contribution for higher education, as evidenced by the \$2 billion influx from international students in Pennsylvania alone. The impact of international students extends beyond the financial realms. It encompasses a global network of outreach, with collaborations spanning across Harrisburg, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh, as well as diplomatic embassies overseas. Collaborative efforts with nonprofit organizations like Study Pennsylvania, a consortium of higher education institutions looking to recruit international enrollment, highlight the collective endeavor to provide resources and support for international students and higher education institutions.

**Bill Keyes, Program Director,
International House Philadelphia**

Keyes discussed the role of nonprofit organizations in fostering opportunities for international students, not just in education but also in the job market. Despite the setbacks imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic on international student enrollment, the focus remains on revitalizing international student enrollment in higher education and navigating the evolving policy landscape. With over a million international students nationwide and a growing number of international graduate students, there is still the critical need to address the enrollment decline faced by colleges and universities in Pennsylvania. Initiatives such as virtual recruitment and partnerships with organizations like Study PA aim to mitigate these challenges and increase international student enrollment. Although, the importance of international students goes beyond academic enrollment. Keyes noted that international graduates are filling the U.S. skills gap, as a third of U.S. doctorates were awarded to F1 visa holders in 2019. Keyes highlighted that many international students pursuing higher education in the U.S. intend on staying and working in the U.S., as these pathways are enabled through higher education on an F1 visa.



Pictured (L-R): Dr. Laura Dimino, Nic Cervantes, Bill Keyes, Dr. Jody Pritt (via Zoom), Dagmara Karnowski (via Zoom).

**Dr. Jody Pritt, Assistant Vice Provost,
International Student & Scholar Advising (ISSA),
Penn State University**

Dr. Pritt discussed the important population of international students at Penn State and opportunities for them beyond academics. International students improve undergraduate and graduate enrollment, while bringing a fresh perspective to higher education. Furthermore, international postgraduates bring this same fresh perspective to the workplace, enriching it with diversity and inclusion. Their motivation, hard work, and global network contribute significantly to filling skill gaps and enhancing the workforce. Furthermore, Dr. Pritt noted the opportunities for immigrant residents to attend designated campus events. She highlighted the importance of engaging international students and residents through community outreach and involvement. Campus events promote engagement, resource availability, workforce opportunities,

and networking. Emphasized was the importance of using higher education institutions as community centers and partnering with local organizations to share education, culture, and ideas.

**Dagmara Karnowski, Interim Manager,
International Student & Scholar Advising (ISSA),
Penn State University**

Karnowski shared data on international students in the United States and the many avenues available to them for on-job learning programs. Karnowski noted that federal regulations permit the employment of international students on F-1 and exchange visitor student J-1 visas, with certain limits. The U.S. allows eligible international students and new graduates the opportunity to gain on-job learning that supplements knowledge gained in their academic studies. Practical training, or on-job learning programs, include Optional Practical Training (OPT) and Curricular Practical Training (CPT). Hiring international students for practical training does not require a change of their visa status. Additionally, the employer does not have to pay the cost associated with obtaining proper authorization. Higher education institutions like Penn State play a vital role not only in educating international students but also in facilitating their integration into the workforce through these types of training programs and opportunities for practical experience.

Karnowski explained that career and internship planning for international students is a joint effort and referenced Penn State Great Valley as an example campus that provides resources to international students seeking on-job learning. She noted that career managers are available at PSU Great Valley that provide an overview of career services, and resources, such as Nittany Lion Careers and GoingGlobal. These resources help students highlight their unique skills to employers, promote upcoming programs and events, and connect students with employers. Additionally, she explained the role of PSU Great Valley's International Student & Scholar Advising Office (ISSA), where international students are assisted with information regarding CPT (criteria for internship, acceptance letter details, and the approval process) and OPT (overview and details regarding timeframes, important dates, and procedures). The ISSA also assists international students with securing their Social Security number, answering questions related to change of visa status, on-campus employment requirements, and employers' education. These efforts not only benefit the students themselves, but also contribute to the broader economic and cultural landscape of Pennsylvania and the U.S. as a whole.

**Concurrent Session 2:
Advanced Manufacturing**

**Jason Fink, President/CEO,
Williamsport/Lycoming Chamber of Commerce**

This panel provided insights into a discussion on advanced manufacturing, particularly in the context of rural areas like Lycoming County, Pennsylvania. Fink shared local perspective on the challenges of attracting and retaining businesses in Lycoming County, highlighting labor force issues and population decline. He discussed the importance of the manufacturing industry in Lycoming County to sustain the workforce and opportunities for attracting international talent.

**Carl Marrara, Executive Director,
Pennsylvania Manufacturers' Association**

Marrara shared statewide perspectives, emphasizing the competitiveness of Pennsylvania in manufacturing, and cited data presentations on rural workforce statistics and industry composition. He stressed the importance of addressing education and infrastructure needs to support the manufacturing sector effectively.

**Taka Yamauchi, President/CEO,
SEKISUI KYDEX**

Yamauchi, originally from Japan, shared his experiences of managing business development in rural areas, emphasizing the quality of life and natural surroundings as selling points for attracting international talent, particularly from countries like Japan. He also highlighted his experiences as an international business entrepreneur managing the manufacturing company SEKISUI KYDEX, based in Bloomsburg, and the importance of integrating international talent in private-sector industries. Yamauchi emphasized the need for flexibility in the workplace to accommodate international workforce integration.

**David Lanzer, Director of Operations,
West Pharmaceutical Services**

Lanzer, from West Pharmaceuticals, discussed his experiences with hiring immigrants and overcoming language barriers in his company's manufacturing operations. He discussed the adaptations to their hiring processes and provided language support to integrate international workers successfully into their workforce, noting their exceptional dedication and contribution. Language support is necessary to integrate the international workforce into manufacturing. Additionally, Lanzer noted the importance of flexibility and adaptation of services for international workers.

Overall, the discussion highlighted the challenges and opportunities in advanced manufacturing, emphasizing the importance of addressing workforce needs, embracing diversity, and creating supportive environments for businesses to thrive in rural areas like Pennsylvania. Openness, transparency, and adaptability emerge as key principles for success in this sector.



Pictured (L-R): Dr. Kyle Kopko, Jason Fink, Carl Marrara, Taka Yamauchi, David Lanzer.

Comparative Perspectives: Pennsylvania and Canada Approaches to Immigration

Sloane Davidson, Founder/CEO, Hello Neighbor Network (Pittsburgh)

The panel discussion delved into various aspects of immigration, focusing on the experiences and challenges faced by immigrants and refugees in both Pennsylvania and Canada, along with successful practices and key resources for supporting their resettlement. Davidson emphasized the importance of community support and mentorship for refugees, highlighting the need for ongoing assistance beyond the initial 90-day federal support period. She discussed the success of programs like Hello Neighbor in educating and engaging everyday citizens to welcome immigrants and refugees, citing initiatives such as the Belonging Begins With Us campaign. Challenges include motivating Americans to embrace change and supporting immigrant retention.



Pictured (L-R): Miguel Ruiz, Assistant Deputy Secretary, Pennsylvania Office of Policy and Planning; Sloane Davidson; Daniel Cervan-Gil (via Zoom).

Daniel Cervan-Gil, Associate Director, World Education Services (WES)

Cervan-Gil shared insights into Canada's immigration policies, including annual immigration-level approvals by Parliament and initiatives to address job vacancies and integrate immigrants into the labor force. He mentioned the Immigrants Work Pilot Project and efforts to remove barriers to international work experience recognition. Key resources identified to support refugees in resettlement included educational programs like the Gateway Program, which helps verify credentials, and wraparound services addressing health care, workplace practices, and family support. Regarding resource allocation for accepting immigrants, Davidson emphasized the importance of community engagement and sponsorship programs, while Cervan-Gil highlighted the need for workforce training, streamlined licensing processes, and combating discrimination. The discussion also touched on challenges faced by communities experiencing demographic shifts due to immigration, such as Hazleton's transformation into a predominantly Latino area, and the need for companies like Amazon to support immigrant integration beyond the workplace. In summary, the panel underscored the significance of community support, accessible resources, and proactive measures to facilitate successful immigrant integration and address challenges in both Pennsylvania and Canada.

Anchor Institutions

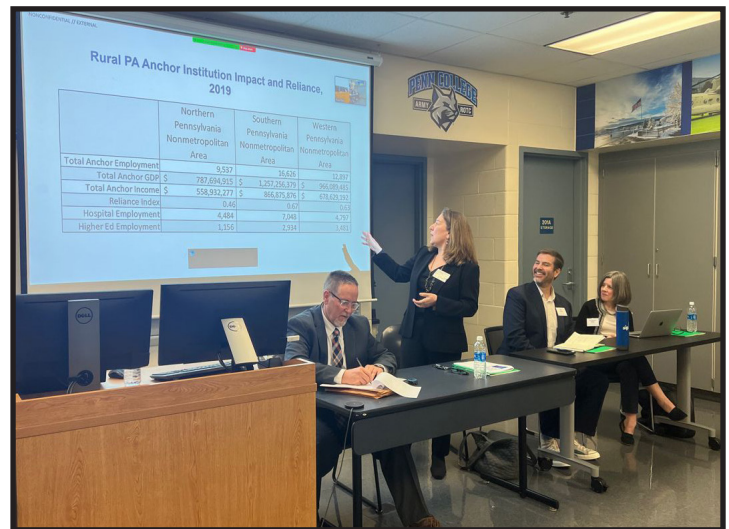
Dr. Deborah Diamond, Director, Anchor Economy, Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia

Dr. Diamond emphasized the significance of anchor institutions, such as hospitals and colleges and universities, in regional economies. These institutions are major drivers of the workforce and provide essential services in both urban and rural areas. Furthermore, anchor institutions are important employers of international residents and service providers to international communities. Regional economies heavily depend on these anchor institutions for employment and stability. Additionally, anchor institutions are often the reason immigrant workers come to rural areas to work. The Federal Reserve Bank considers the impact of stable prices and the employment provided by anchor institutions on regional economies.

Economic activity related to anchor institutions occurs at three levels:

- Direct spending by the institutions and their employees.
- Purchases of goods and services by anchor institutions within the community.
- General spending by individuals and the employment generated in the economy as a result.

Diamond discussed that there have been notable shifts in college enrollment and health care services, impacting the economic dynamics of regions. The international workforce aids in providing workers to anchor institutions, as well, as preserving their services to their communities. She highlighted the Anchor Economy Dashboard, as a resource available per county at www.PhiladelphiaFed.org/AnchorEconomy, providing user-friendly data for the entire country.



Pictured (L-R): Jonathan Johnson, Dr. Deborah Diamond, Brad Zdenek, Dr. Elizabeth Wright.

Brad Zdenek, Director, Economic Development and Student Programs, Penn State University

Zdenek introduced the Invent Penn State Initiative, which has brought significant changes to Pennsylvania's economy. There has been a declining reliance on traditional economic sectors. Services are provided through the initiative, and Commonwealth campuses are leveraged

for economic growth. The initiative involves co-creating services with local partners and extending them to local communities. This led to the creation of the Penn State LaunchBox and Innovation Space Networks. Zdenek highlighted that over the span of four years, 21 locations have been established. Services offered are based on the specific needs of communities, including entrepreneurial support and many others, and are provided either for free or at a low cost.

Dr. Elizabeth Wright, Chancellor, Penn State Hazleton

Chancellor Wright discussed how Penn State Hazleton and other Commonwealth Campuses serve as economic drivers in rural areas. Commonwealth Campuses offer lower-cost and affordable college options for students, especially those from underrepresented communities. The PSU Hazleton LaunchBox serves as a free, or low-cost, start-up accelerator and co-working space for entrepreneurs in downtown Hazleton, acting as a hub for social and economic mobility. It offers dual language support for language barriers and diverse business startups in Hazleton. Chancellor Wright also added that the PSU Hazleton LaunchBox offers Hispanic entrepreneurship, outreach for the changing and growing population demographics of Hazleton, and youth entrepreneurship. Wright noted that 90% of the LaunchBox clients are immigrants, which has been a focus of the LaunchBox to accommodate the immigrant population in the area.

Anchor institutions are vital for international workers because they offer stable employment, benefits, and opportunities for career advancement. They also promote diversity, provide community support, and facilitate social integration, making it easier for immigrants to thrive in their new surroundings.



Pictured (L-R): Anuj Gupta, Alex Beck, Tim Rivera, Zoe Swarzenski.

Plenary Session 2: Resettlement and Integration

Tim Rivera, Senior Advisor, Innovation and Strategy, World Learning

This panel included various perspectives on refugee resettlement and integration, particularly focusing on initiatives in different regions of the U.S. Rivera provided an overview of refugee resettlement on a global scale, highlighting that there are 110 million forcibly displaced people worldwide, with 36.4 million being refugees and

6.1 million being asylum seekers. He discussed the U.S. Resettlement and Replacement Program under the Biden administration, which is conducted nationwide. Refugees are vetted by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) upon arrival, and they receive financial assistance totaling \$1,325 per person to aid in housing, employment, and other needs. Additional services such as case management, Medicaid, SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), ESL (English as a Second Language) classes, and permanent housing assistance are also provided by the Department of State, Department of Refugee Resettlement, and Department of Health and Human Services. There is an expectation of minimal self-sufficiency within 90 days, with additional support available for up to five years.

Alex Beck, Welcoming Communities Manager, and Initiative Director, Southern Vermont Working Communities Initiative

Beck discussed his specialized work with Afghan refugee resettlement in Vermont, emphasizing the need for diversity and immigrant populations in rural areas of Vermont, which were significantly affected by Hurricane Irene, leading to a loss of population and workforce. He noted his organization's commitment to providing employment services to refugees and highlighted the increase in Brattleboro's population, with one in 100 residents being Afghan refugees. The influx of refugees has contributed approximately \$6 million in tax income to the area, with an average salary of \$19 per hour for refugee workers. Beck addressed the challenges of resource scarcity in rural environments and the need for more support services.

Anuj Gupta, President/CEO, The Welcoming Center (Philadelphia)

Gupta discussed the timeline of Philadelphia's half-century decline in population and the recent emergence of the foreign-born population. As the son of immigrants, he moved back to Philadelphia during its population decline and emphasized the need for immigration to facilitate population growth. He discussed the startup of the organization he manages, The Welcoming Center, a refugee resettlement organization based in Philadelphia. Since its instatement, he discussed that the city has seen a steady increase in foreign-born immigration, with a 5% increase in recent years. This resurgence has led to increased labor participation and occupational diversity, as well as higher educational attainment among immigrants. Gupta expressed a desire to expand refugee resettlement efforts to rural Pennsylvania.

In the panel Q&A discussion, the focus shifted to the role of higher education institutions in supporting refugee resettlement through English Language Learning (ELL) training, improved language learning resources, and workforce development initiatives. There is also discussion about the need for immigrant inclusion in rural economic development, with an emphasis on providing immigrants with access to the same resources as American families. Panelists advocated for the expansion of urban models of immigrant inclusion in rural areas and investing in working-class infrastructure to support immigrant communities. Overall, the discussions highlighted the importance of collaboration between the public and private sectors in refugee resettlement for financial support and federal funding, and the need to provide long-term resources for refugees and immigrants to en-

sure their successful integration and contribution to local economies.

Concurrent Session 3: Agriculture

**Bob Morgan, Pennsylvania State Director,
USDA Rural Development**

Morgan highlighted federal government incentive programs, such as the USDA's extensive array of over 70 loan, grant, and loan guarantee programs designed to facilitate rural development. He emphasized USDA Rural Development's significant investment in single-family housing and mortgage assistance and noted that the agency's responsibilities have expanded over time in accordance with Congressional actions. Morgan provided further details on various USDA programs and highlighted the challenges faced by applicants in navigating the application process.



Pictured (L-R): Katie Park, David Baird, Bob Morgan.

David Baird, Director, Migrant Education Program, Millersville University

Baird discussed the Migrant Education Program (MEP) at Millersville University, which has been federally funded since 1965 by the U.S. Department of Education. Millersville administers the MEP for five counties and serves more than half of the statewide enrollment in the program, primarily aiding the children of migrant farm workers. Baird highlighted the challenges faced by migrant families, including temporary jobs in processing industries, and emphasized the importance of education for migrant children, who often serve as translators for their parents. He also discussed the tracking of eligible families through a database, noting the seasonal migration patterns of migrant families. Overall, the panel shed light on the efforts of government agencies and educational institutions to support rural communities and migrant education, emphasizing the importance of access to resources and educational opportunities for vulnerable populations.

Engaging Stigmatized Groups in the Labor Force

**Dr. Doug Swanson, State Specialist,
Labor and Workforce Development,
University of Missouri Extension**

Dr. Swanson challenged the notion that "nobody wants to work anymore," attributing workforce shortages to long-term demographic shifts. Over the last decade, the workforce has grown by only one percent, while the overall 16+ age cohort has shrunk by eight percent. The number

of older workers is increasing, and immigration levels have decreased. Even without new job creation, there's a looming shortage of workers to fill positions in the future. There were barriers highlighted in workforce participation, such as 11.4 percent of men are not in the labor force, with 47 percent citing pain medication addiction as a reason.



Craig Livermore, Co-Director, Midstate C.O.S.H, Council for Occupational Safety and Health

Livermore highlighted that seven million men aged 25 to 54 are not seeking work, with 45 percent being ex-prisoners. Reasons for workforce non-participation include illness or disability, caregiving, and education. Access to available jobs is hindered by what Livermore terms a "life capacity gap," with sober attendance being a significant issue for employers. Rural domestic men face lower workforce participation compared to immigrant men, with farms relying on foreign labor.

The panel addressed barrier gaps and paths to move forward, such as initiatives like the Cost of Addiction program aimed at destigmatizing addiction and increasing workforce participation. Additionally, the Rural Immigrant Success Exchange (RISE) program, which provides pre-skills training to immigrant workers. There is a need to address systemic barriers to obtaining quality jobs, particularly for working-class families. Progress has been made since the 1960s in making jobs accessible to marginalized groups, but significant barriers persist. Livermore emphasized the brokenness of the disability system, advocating for dignity and support for individuals with mental illnesses and addictions. Panelists suggested that policies should support individuals transitioning back into the workforce without penalizing them for earning too much. Furthermore, the focus should shift from blaming individuals for workforce shortages to addressing systemic barriers. The panel noted that employers need to adapt to changing demographics and be more inclusive in their hiring practices. Support systems should prioritize dignity and assistance for individuals facing addiction, mental illness, and other challenges. Programs should provide practical skills and support to marginalized groups to increase workforce participation.

Plenary Session 3: Introduction to International Training

**Rachel Mauer, President,
German American Chamber of Commerce,
Pittsburgh Chapter**

Mauer discussed the structure of apprenticeship programs in Germany compared to the U.S., particularly focusing on the Pittsburgh area. She discussed the organization that she is president of, called the German American Chamber of Commerce, which operates differently

from its German counterparts. In Germany, it is common practice for all companies to join business organizations, which play a crucial role in coordinating apprenticeship programs. Apprenticeships are integrated into various career paths, and companies drive the curriculum, ensuring that students receive relevant training aligned with industry needs. This approach includes access to training, curriculum development, and training for mentors. Apprenticeships are seen as a driving force behind addressing job demands for highly skilled positions. For example, there is a significant investment in training polymer technicians.



Pictured (L-R): Alena Klimas, Rachel Mauer, Dr. Justin Starr.

Dr. Justin Starr, Endowed Professor, Advanced Technologies, Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC)

Dr. Starr, a professor from the Community College of Allegheny, discussed how companies drive the curriculum in apprenticeship programs. Students often work for these companies while pursuing their education. The college focuses on growing advanced manufacturing and maintains multiple cohorts in the pipeline to meet industry demands. A key difference between the German and American models lies in the perception of apprenticeships. In Germany, there's no stigma attached to technical schools or similar programs, unlike in the U.S. Apprenticeships are considered a viable career path from a young age in Germany, starting around 14 to 15 years old. Starr emphasized the cultural mindset difference between Germany and the U.S. regarding entrusting young people with work responsibilities. He believes that the U.S. needs to improve in this regard to enhance workforce development. Both Mauer and Starr agree that apprenticeship programs improve completion rates, job placement, and self-sufficiency among participants. However, they acknowledge challenges in

implementing such programs in the U.S., citing bureaucratic hurdles and the reluctance of colleges to give credit for certification.

Mauer's model aims to streamline the process for companies by reducing their workload, allowing them to join the program without significant administrative burdens. In contrast, the German system relies on government-driven initiatives and collaboration among companies to establish industry standards. The discussion highlights potential variations in apprenticeship programs across different regions, such as Pennsylvania, suggesting that each area may have its own curriculum and standards.

Thank You

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Pictured (L-R): Michael Hackett, Alena Klimas, Zoe Swarzenski, Dr. Kyle Kopko.

Scan the QR code for the symposium recordings, agenda, speaker list, and resources.



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Please note: The views expressed by panelists do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of State, World Learning, Center for Rural Pennsylvania, or any partnering organizations.