



Supporting Global Talent and Strengthening Wisconsin's Workforce

A Practitioner's Guide for Supporting Career Navigation for Internationally Trained Immigrants and Refugees Across the State

Table of Contents

[Acknowledgements](#)

[How to Use this Guide](#)

[Why This Matters: Advancing Inclusive Career Pathways](#)

Introduces the case for action in Wisconsin: why immigrant and refugee talent matters to the state's economy, workforce shortages and community well-being.

[Chapter 1: A National Challenge – and an Opportunity](#)

Explores the underutilization of Internationally Trained Professionals (ITPs) in the U.S. workforce with key data points and stories illustrating the scope of the challenge.

[Chapter 2: Strength-based Intake and Early Advising](#)

Outlines strategies for gathering information early in the intake process that highlight strengths rather than deficits. Provides practical tools for staff including questions to ask, cultural considerations and tips for setting a positive tone from the start.

[Chapter 3: Assessing U.S. Job Readiness with Equity in Mind](#)

Describes how practitioners can evaluate language, digital literacy, and professional readiness while avoiding common biases. Includes guidance on approved assessments in Wisconsin and ways to connect learners with supportive services.

[Chapter 4: Mapping Career Goals – Higher Education, Licensure, or Employment](#)

Breaks down three career pathways for ITPs – continuing education, pursuing licensure, or entering the workforce directly. Offers decision-making tools, case scenarios, and Wisconsin-specific guidance for navigating each path.

[Chapter 5: Planning Forward – SMART Goals, Career Maps and Pathways Tools](#)

Provides actionable planning tools including career maps, goal-setting templates, and reflection exercises. Shows how practitioners can help learners translate career aspirations into step-by-step action plans for career paths that are realistic and motivating.

Chapter 6: Transferable Skills, Credential Evaluation and Related and Alternative Careers

Explains how to identify and leverage transferable skills, the process of credential evaluation, and the role of alternative career pathways when direct licensure or employment in one's field of choice is not immediately possible. Includes Wisconsin case examples and key national resources.

Chapter 7: Skills for Workforce Success

Covers essential workplace skills, cultural expectations and soft skills needed for success in U.S. workplaces. Provides tools for integrating workforce readiness into guidance sessions and adult education classrooms.

Chapter 8: Networking, Mentoring, and Peer Support

Highlight the power of professional relationships and community in advancing careers. Shares strategies for connecting ITPs with mentors, peer networks, and professional associations, with Wisconsin examples of successful peer-led and community-based initiatives.

Chapter 9: Engaging Employers as Partners

Provides approaches for building trust and partnerships with employers, including talking points to address common misconceptions about hiring global talent.

Chapter 10: Resources for Asset Mapping and Partnering

Offers tools and frameworks for mapping local and state resources, identifying partnership opportunities and building cross-sector collaborations.



The Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) provides comprehensive educational opportunities that position students and employers to thrive in the face of rapid changes in the workplace, creating economic vitality for individuals and communities throughout the state.

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WES is a non-profit social enterprise that supports the educational, economic, and social inclusion of immigrants, refugees, and international students. For 50 years, WES has set the standard for international academic credential evaluation, supporting millions of people as they seek to achieve their academic and professional goals. Through decades of experience as a leader in global education, WES has developed a wide range of tools to pursue social impact at scale. From evaluating academic credentials to shaping policy, designing programs, and providing philanthropic funding, we partner with a diverse set of organizations, leaders, and networks to uplift individuals and drive systems change. Together with its partners, WES enables people to learn, work, and thrive in new places.

Who this guide is for: This guide is designed for those who directly work with [internationally trained immigrants \(ITPs\)](#) in the state of Wisconsin.

Primary Audience: Career Navigators, case managers, or workforce professionals who advise immigrants and refugees on career pathways in various fields.

Secondary Audience: Adult Education, program coordinators, employment specialists, licensing support staff, technical college staff, and other partners involved in supporting internationally trained professionals.

For clarity and consistency, we will refer to all the above roles collectively as practitioners throughout this guide.

How to use this guide

This guide is a comprehensive resource for practitioners in Wisconsin working with [internationally trained professionals \(ITPs\)](#) who already have credentials, education, or significant professional experience from countries outside the U.S.

Use this guide to:

- Find relevant information to guide the career pathways of ITPs
- Access comprehensive resources
- Personalize career tools
- Locate partners and model programs

Each chapter builds on the previous one, but chapters can be accessed by interest and need. Each chapter can stand on its own.



Why This Matters: Advancing Inclusive Career Pathways

Practitioners supporting [internationally trained professionals \(ITPs\)](#) often face a complex challenge: how to provide meaningful, effective career guidance in a system that doesn't always recognize international credentials, experience, or barriers to re-entry. Many want to help ITPs return to their professions or pivot successfully but may not have access to tailored tools, clear guidance, or local resources to do so.

This guide offers practical strategies, real-world examples, and **Wisconsin-specific insights** to equip practitioners with knowledge and confidence to better support ITPs while also advancing career pathways.

The Broader Context:

Industries across the U.S. are facing an inevitable future. Older workers are retiring, economic landscapes are shifting, and many occupations are experiencing significant shortages. These shortages ripple through local economies—driving up prices, delaying

services and weakening community vitality. The effects are visible everywhere: higher grocery costs, longer waits for care, shortened restaurant hours, and stalled construction.

[This holds true in Wisconsin as well.](#) With [projected growth](#) in industries such as healthcare, education and manufacturing, businesses must adapt by attracting and retaining qualified and well-matched talent to reinvigorate the workforce and help local economies thrive.

One part of the solution is often overlooked - the many immigrants already working in states such as Wisconsin. They often bring education, certification, or extensive work experience from another country and are key to building stronger, more viable economies and sustainable local communities.

Who Are Internationally Trained Professionals (ITPs)?

Internationally Trained Professionals (referred to in this guide as ITPs) are individuals who obtained education, credentials, or extensive work experience outside the U.S. They represent a diverse range of countries, languages, disciplines, and pathways. They may include:

- Engineers, nurses and educators with degrees from other countries
- Refugees with interrupted careers due to adverse circumstances in their country of origin
- Green card holders seeking to re-enter their profession
- Spouses of U.S. citizens with advanced international education



Chapter 1: A National Challenge and an Opportunity

Nationally, nearly 2 million immigrants with college degrees are underemployed. This results in an **annual loss of over \$39 billion in wages and more than \$10 billion in taxes** ([Migration Policy Institute](#)). This talent mismatch is not just a personal loss for [internationally trained professionals \(ITPs\)](#).

In Wisconsin, immigrants and refugees are diverse in country of origin, profession and pathway. Many hold advanced degrees or certifications and bring years of experience in their fields.

A Snapshot of Wisconsin's Immigrant Workforce

Demographics: As of 2023, approximately 5% of Wisconsin's residents (320,000 individuals) were born in another country. The largest immigrant populations originate from Mexico, India, China, Laos and the Philippines ([American Immigration Council, 2023](#)).

Labor Market: Wisconsin's unemployment rate remains low at 3.2% (seasonally adjusted). Key sectors like healthcare, manufacturing, and professional services are growing, presenting an increasing demand for experienced and trained workers. ([Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development - March 2025 Employment Data](#)). This

environment presents a strategic opportunity to engage internationally trained professionals.

The Cost of Skill Underutilization

Despite their qualifications, many immigrants and refugees in Wisconsin are not working in roles that reflect their skills.

Thirty-two percent of immigrants in Wisconsin hold a bachelor's degree or higher ([American Immigration Council, 2020](#)). Yet nearly 30% of college-educated immigrants in Wisconsin are employed in jobs that do not match their level of education ([American Immigration Council, 2023](#)).

The misalignment reflects missed economic potential and deep-rooted systemic barriers. But it also underscores the fact that the problem is structural, and therefore solvable.

Real Stories – Real Impact: Emefa Arisiya

Originally a midwife in Ghana, Emefa emigrated to the U.S. in 2018 and overcame cultural, academic and personal hurdles to earn her nursing degree from UW-Oshkosh. With support from writing labs, multicultural centers and faculty members, she thrived and even spoke at graduation as a class speaker. Reflecting on her journey, Emefa shared, *“Our journey was not just about crossing borders; it was about crossing boundaries that existed within us. We juggled language barriers, cultural differences and the weight of homesickness. Some of us worked tirelessly, often holding multiple jobs to support ourselves all while pursuing our dreams of becoming nurses.”*

Today, she brings the same resilience, cultural competence, and clinical expertise to underserved communities in Wisconsin. Her story illustrates how inclusive career pathways and wraparound support systems enable internationally trained professionals to meet urgent healthcare needs and strengthen local care delivery.

[Read her story .](#)

Practitioners as Part of the Solution

As practitioners, you are not just a witness to this challenge; you are an essential part of the solution. You can help reduce structural and individual barriers in collaboration with ITPs and ecosystem partners. You can help shape more inclusive, resilient, and thriving communities.

Structural Solutions

- Support the expansion or development of affordable, accessible workforce training programs
- Advocate for equitable policies that address racism, xenophobia and systemic exclusion
- Help build employer infrastructures to welcome immigrant and refugee talent

Individual-Level Support

- Offer industry-specific English language instruction and contextualized career coaching
- Expand [access to accurate information on credential translation, evaluation and recognition](#)
- Facilitate or connect to mentorship and networking opportunities
- Provide culturally responsive job search and workplace navigation resources
- Help navigate paperwork and supportive training programs as part of this process.

Real Stories – Real Impact: Success Stories from the Wisconsin Technical College System

Through working with a career navigator, an internationally trained professional (ITP) named Lilia from Ecuador who is receiving support under a grant obtained a better job in her target career field of education. She now works at a local preschool caring for kids in our community. She plans to apply to graduate school at UW-Madison for admission in Fall 2026 to pursue her master's degree.

After receiving support from a career navigator to form a Personal Education and Career Plan, Gabriel, an [Internationally Trained Professional \(ITP\)](#) from Guinea, successfully completed the steps to apply to the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program. After taking the ACCUPLACER several times, he was admitted to the CNA program through Caminos

with Centro Hispano. He started his first program classes in August. The program offers night classes, so he is able to continue working to support his family while going to school, which is important to him. He is also able to focus on his studies without worrying about paying tuition costs. He's one step closer to achieving his career goal of advancing from being a Personal Care Assistant to becoming a Certified Nursing Assistant.



Chapter 2: Strength-based Intake and Early Advising

The intake process is often an individual's first real interaction with a new program, agency, or practitioner. For [internationally trained professionals \(ITPs\)](#), this first impression carries even more weight. It can reinforce feelings of exclusion, or it can create a sense of dignity, belonging, and forward momentum.

The Problem with Traditional Intake

Many standard intake forms and interviews are transactional - focused on data collection, compliance, or identifying deficits. While efficiency matters, a checklist approach risks:

- Missing critical context and aspirations

- Repeating trauma from earlier gatekeeping experiences
- Reinforcing power imbalances
- Overlooking key assets (skills, networks, credentials, experience)

For ITPs, these early encounters can either affirm their identity as professionals or signal that their background is undervalued in the U.S. system.

The Power of Strength-Based Advising

A strength-based approach shifts the focus from what’s missing to what’s already present. It asks:

- What knowledge, skills, and strengths do the individual already have?
- What are their long-term goals and values?
- What resources and relationships can we build?

When intake is relational and intentional, it sets the tone for mutual respect and shared goal setting.

Creating a Positive Intake Experience

Here are five core principles for reimagining intake for ITPs:

1. Lead with Listening, Not Labeling

Start by asking open-ended questions. Let clients narrate their professional journey.

“Can you tell me about the work you did before coming here?”

“What are you most proud of in your career so far?”

2. Name and Validate Their Professional Identity

Refer to the individual as a professional—even if they are not currently working in their field.

“As an engineer, you have already developed so many skills we can build on.”

3. Avoid Coded or Deficit-Laden Language

Language like “low-skilled,” “not qualified,” or “needs remediation” can be stifling. Instead, describe what support will help advance their existing skills.

“We offer tools to help you connect your international training to opportunities here.”

4. Ask About Conditions of Work Sensitivity and Solutions in Mind

Consider asking what conditions exist and how support services could help (transportation, legal status, childcare) but avoid framing them as barriers.

“What kinds of support would make it easier for you to pursue your career goals right now?”

5. Document More Than Data

Use intake forms that allow for narrative, context, and nuance versus just checkboxes.

Sample Strength-Based Intake Questions:

- What education or training did you complete before coming to the U.S.?
- What types of work did you do, and what did you enjoy most?
- What languages do you speak and use professionally?
- What are your short-term and long-term career goals?
- What support systems (friends, faith communities, networks) do you currently use?

A structured template can help guide the conversation and ensure consistent data collection. Switchboard offers a [sample tool](#) that can be adapted for Wisconsin.

6. Map Background to Wisconsin Licensure Pathways

If individuals indicated interest in a regulated profession such as nursing, teaching, or engineering, a structured intake process can help identify which Wisconsin licensure pathway may apply ([see more on this in chapter 4](#)).

4. Develop a Personalized Action Plan

Once a licensure path has been identified, work with the individual to develop a clear, step-by-step action plan. Consider using a [SMART \(Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound\) goal](#) template such as the one listed in the World Education Nursing guide [World Education SMART Goal template \(see end of guide\) here](#). The plan should include specific tasks, estimated timelines and connections to local partners who can assist with each step. The plan should include specific tasks, estimated timelines, and connections to local partners who can assist with each step.



Chapter 3: Assessing Readiness with Equity in Mind

Assessment Plays a Critical Role in Career Navigation

For practitioners supporting ITPs, the goal is not to measure who is “ready” and who is not. Instead, it is to understand where someone is starting from, so we can support forward movement with clarity, context, and compassion.

The Problem with Traditional Assessments

Many assessment practices used in education, employment, or training systems unintentionally act as barriers, especially when:

- They rely solely on standardized tests that don't reflect real-world contexts
- They assume U.S.-centric knowledge, terminology, or workplace norms
- They treat readiness as fixed rather than developmental
- They overlook cultural differences in communication or self-presentation

When assessments are used rigidly, they reinforce deficit mindsets: “not ready,” “not qualified,” or “not employable.” Instead, assessments should be used to customize support, not limit access.

Better Practice for Assessments (including language skills)

- **Assess to Plan, Not to Sort**
Use assessment results to identify support and co-design next steps—not to filter people out of opportunities.
- **Use Multiple Measures**
Combine formal tools with informal conversations, sample work, or real-world scenarios for a more holistic view.
- **Include the Learner's Perspective**
Ask: “How confident do you feel using English in a work setting?” or “What digital tools do you feel strongest using?”
- **Consider Context and Culture**
Be mindful that body language, tone, confidence and communication styles vary across cultures and may influence assessment outcomes.
- **Focus on Strengths and Supports**
Document what the person can already do and clearly outline what support would help them go further.

A Note to Practitioners: English communication skills (spoken, written and professional) are key for navigating the U.S. workplace, accessing higher-paying jobs, and engaging confidently in systems. For many [internationally trained professionals \(ITPs\)](#), strengthening English skills is not about starting from scratch, but about building on existing abilities in new ways.

It is important to approach English development as a tool for career mobility and voice, not as a judgment of intelligence or ability. Practitioners play a key role in how English learning is framed - not as a barrier, rather a steppingstone to reach one's full potential.

Language learning is most effective when paired with respect for the individual's existing expertise and clear, encouraging pathways forward such as contextualized English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, career-specific vocabulary support, or peer language exchanges. These strategies not only support language growth, they also reinforce confidence, agency and career alignment.

Wisconsin-specific Resources and Best Practices for Assessing English Proficiency

Approved Assessments for Adult and Secondary Education in Wisconsin

Wisconsin adult education programs funded through the [Adult Education Family Literacy Act](#) (AEFLA) must use approved assessments for student placement and progress tracking.

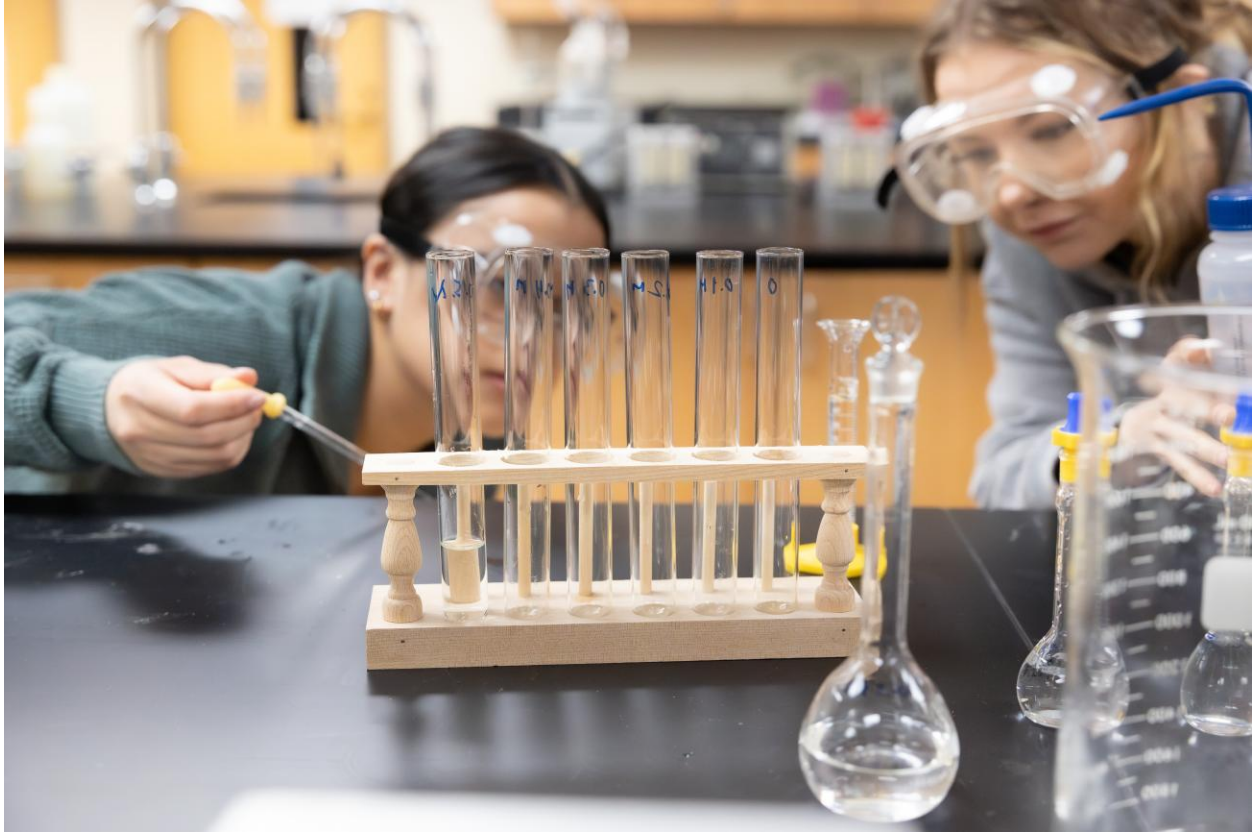
Full details and testing guidelines

[2024–2025 Wisconsin Assessment Policy PDF](#)

Adult Education & Technical Colleges Offering English as a Second Language (ESL)

Check with the colleges in your district for courses and course schedules [here](#).

Connect with [Wisconsin Literacy, Inc](#) which supports 80 community-based literacy programs throughout the state through technical assistance, health literacy, workforce connection and advocacy.



Chapter 4: Mapping Career Goals – Higher Education, Licensure, or Employment

Practitioner Tool: Pathway Comparison Chart

Pathway	Advantages	Considerations
Employment	Income right away, builds U.S. experience	May not align with long-term goals
Licensure	Return to full professional status in career field	Time-consuming, often expensive
Postsecondary Education	Career change, credential recognized in U.S.	Requires financial and time investment

Note: Some paths require a combination of the above individual pathways.

The Role of the Practitioner

Practitioners are often seen as guides, but it is important to center the individual job seeker as the driver of their career journey. In your role you may be positioned to:

- Present clear, accurate options
- Ask thoughtful questions to uncover priorities
- Clarify systems, costs and timeframes
- Affirm the individual's long-term vision, even if short-term detours are needed
- Advise job seekers how to balance a job while pursuing licensure and/or taking postsecondary education classes and/or training in specific skills.
- Refer to the right partner(s) who can continue to work with them

Many [internationally trained professionals \(ITPs\)](#) are navigating external pressures such as financial needs or family responsibilities. Effective career planning balances these realities with the individual's aspirations and previous training.

Understanding the Three Core Pathways

1. Direct Employment

This pathway focuses on job entry - often through transitional, related, or adjacent roles.

Best for ITPs who:

- Need income quickly
- Want to gain U.S. work experience
- Are open to building step-by-step toward their goal

Key strategies:

- Identify transferable strengths, skills and adjacent occupations
- Support U.S.-style resume and interview prep
- Recommend volunteering or short-term certificates if helpful
- Frame transitional jobs as steppingstones, not end points

Example: An international dentist working as a dental assistant (see alternative and related career discussion in [chapter 6](#)) while preparing for licensing exams.

2. Licensure or Certification Pathways

In the U.S., professions such as nursing or teaching are licensed and highly regulated professions with certification and licensure requirements designed to protect public health, safety and high standards. It is important to understand that professional licensing boards in each state independently regulate professions, decide which education level, English levels and certifications are needed. It is therefore important to understand the rules and processes in your state. For more information on regulated versus nonregulated professions in the U.S., see this World Education Services explainer.

This path is typically for ITPs who:

- Are committed to returning to their exact profession
- Have time and resources to pursue testing, retraining, or exams
- Want to practice at a similar level as in their home country

Key strategies:

- Provide clear Wisconsin-specific licensing steps
- Help calculate realistic timelines and costs
- Connect to bridge programs or study supports
- Identify temporary roles that keep them close to their field

Example: A teacher from Ghana pursuing certification while working as a substitute teacher. See the [WES Career Pathways Guide](#) for more information and resources for internationally educated teachers.

Credential Evaluation: What you need to know

A credential evaluation provides recognition for an individual's education, training or credentials from another country. See [World Education Services video library](#) for more information on credential evaluations. An evaluation is NOT the same as credential translation or recognition. Translating a credential involves the professional conversion from another language into English to be used in the credential evaluation process. Credential recognition happens when decision makers (such as employers, higher education institutions or licensing bodies) accept the credential evaluation report.

You can direct individuals to the free [WES equivalency tool](#) to get an estimate of how their highest degree translates into the U.S equivalent but note that this does not replace a formal evaluation.

Credential evaluation may be necessary for licensure and enrolling in college, but it may not be necessary for employment. Because the credential evaluation process can be time consuming and costly, always refer individuals to the relevant decision-making body (for example licensing board, employer, etc.) to get the most accurate and updated information on the process and which evaluation provider to go with if needed.

3. Postsecondary Education

Some ITPs choose to pursue a U.S. degree or credential, either to change fields or meet requirements for a license.

Best for ITPs who:

- Need a U.S. credential to move forward
- Want to change careers or specialize
- Want to obtain a short-term credential in the U.S. while working towards the often lengthy licensure process
- Are eligible for in-state tuition, scholarships, or financial aid

Key strategies:

- Assess whether prior coursework can transfer, or if credit for prior learning is available
- [Explore shorter, stackable credentials with clear job outcomes](#)

- Align education choices with job market data. Helpful Wisconsin resources:
 - [Wisconsin Career Pathways](#)
 - [Job Resources](#)
 - [Skills Explorer](#)
 - Take the [Career Quiz](#) to assess your strengths with available career paths
- Support decisions that balance long-term gain and short-term cost

Example: An economist earning a master's degree in public administration to shift into nonprofit leadership.

Helping ITPs Choose pathways

Career mapping should not be a one-time conversation. It is an evolving process that requires ongoing dialogue, reflection, and flexibility. Start by asking:

- What work brings you a sense of purpose or identity?
- What are your most urgent needs right now (income, stability, family)?
- How much time and money can you realistically invest right now?
- What kind of work-life balance do you want in the short and long term?
- Are you open to adjacent career options or new fields?

Tip: Encourage ITPs to create a “parallel plan” - for example, working in a related job while pursuing licensure or a degree part time.

Wisconsin Spotlight:

Licensing requirements vary significantly by profession and state. In Wisconsin, some sectors, such as healthcare and education, have formal licensure processes. Others, such as manufacturing, emphasize experience, safety training and employer-recognized credentials rather than state-regulated licensure.

Below are two scenarios that [internationally trained professionals \(ITPs\)](#) may face, with practical steps for each.

Case 1: Teacher – Hassan from Jordan

Hassan taught high school mathematics in Jordan and is hoping to find a job teaching in a Wisconsin public school, which is regulated by the Department of Public Instruction.

Possible Steps to Enter the Teaching Profession in Wisconsin:

1. Apply for an Educator License
 - Read more here: [Wisconsin DPI Licensing](#)
2. Meet Testing Requirements
 - Praxis Subject Assessments and Foundations of Reading Test may apply
3. Complete a Background Check
4. Explore Emergency Licenses
 - Districts may sponsor temporary licenses while candidates complete full requirements
5. Consider possibility for alternative paths
 - For example, a professional chef who finds a job working as a culinary teacher at a local high school

Practitioner Guidance

Hassan may work as a paraprofessional, tutor, or substitute teacher while fulfilling licensure requirements. See the [WES Career Pathways Guide](#) for more information and resources for internationally educated teachers.

Case 2: Manufacturing – Linh from Vietnam

Linh worked in quality control and machine operation in Vietnam and seeks re-entry into a manufacturing role in Wisconsin.

Steps to Enter Manufacturing in Wisconsin:

1. Identify Transferable Skills
 - Emphasize relevant technical or leadership experience
2. Obtain Industry-Recognized Certifications

- Consider [CNC Operator](#) or [MSSC Certified Production Technician](#), available via Wisconsin technical colleges
3. Access Workforce Support Services
 - Use [Wisconsin Job Centers](#) for resume help, referrals and subsidized training
 4. Attending Employer-Focused Events
 - Many manufacturers rely on hands-on assessments and certificates over formal degrees. Learn more about making the move to manufacturing [here](#).

Find events here: [Wisconsin Job Center-Events](#)

Practitioner Guidance

Linh may access Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) programs that fund training and support entry into technical roles. Find programs [here](#).



Chapter 5: Planning Forward - SMART Goals, Career Maps and Pathways Tools

As a practitioner supporting [internationally trained professionals \(ITPs\)](#), you play a pivotal role in helping individuals move from reflection to action. Many ITPs arrive in Wisconsin with rich experience, high-level education, and personal determination but without a clear understanding of how to navigate complex systems of licensing, employment and education in the U.S.

Planning forward means helping ITPs set realistic, measurable goals while identifying actionable steps and supports. It also means co-creating flexible career maps that honor both short-term opportunities and long-term aspirations.

Start with SMART Goals

SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound) offer a structured way for ITPs to break down complex transitions into manageable steps.

Example:

Instead of: “I want to be a nurse again.”

Rephrase to: “I will complete a Medical Terminology course at (a Wisconsin technical college) by December, then meet with a career navigator to identify next steps for NCLEX preparation by January.”

Practitioners can:

- Provide goal-setting templates (with multilingual support when needed)
- Frame discussions around what is achievable within Wisconsin’s licensing, training and job market systems
- Use goal setting as a trust-building exercise and a way to identify hidden barriers (e.g., childcare, transportation, legal status)

Resource: Download a [SMART Goal template](#) from Madison College.

Build Personalized Career Maps

A [career map](#) is a visual tool that lays out the steps, timelines and potential routes an ITP might follow to reach their desired profession or identify alternative careers. or identify alternative careers.

Key Elements:

- Licensing and credential steps: e.g., prerequisite courses, exams
- Stackable credentials through WTCS colleges: certificates-> diplomas -> degrees
- Parallel tracks: bridging roles (e.g., pharmacy tech, medical interpreter) while pursuing full licensure.

Practitioners can:

- Help ITPs compare U.S. and international job titles and scopes of practice. Use tools like O*NET: <https://www.onetonline.org>
- Utilize [WisConomy](#) for job seeker resources such as job searches, resume building and assessments.
- Use [WTCS program](#) finder to identify ESL-friendly, stackable programs.
- Guide ITPs to [Wisconsin Career Pathways](#) (DWD): read about industries, training, and vocational clusters.
- Explore DVR [Career Pathways](#) for individuals with disabilities – adaptable to many ITP scenarios.

Leveraging Wisconsin’s Career Pathway Tools

- [Wisconsin Career Pathways \(DWD\)](#)
- Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) :
 - Host to 500+ programs with career-oriented diplomas and certificates; includes an [interactive “Career Quiz.”](#)

Practitioner’s Role: Facilitate Ongoing Planning

Steps You can Take:

1. Strengths-based intake: capture degrees, licenses, language skills, soft skills.
2. Collaborative mapping: use pathway visuals and tools during one-on-one planning sessions.
3. SMART goal check-ins: establish routine reviews (quarterly suggested).
4. Adapt and pivot: respond flexibly to changes (e.g. family, housing, COVID shifts).
5. Resource bridge-building: connect ITPs to:
 - WTCS for stackable, ESL-accessible credentials
 - University of Wisconsin colleges for prep courses
 - Adult education and workforce centers for Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE)/[IET](#) programs

Case Example: Promoting Local Planning with ITPs

Take Sara, a pharmacist from Pakistan who now resides in Waukesha:

- SMART goal: Complete WTCS pharmacy technician certificate by July.

- Career map:
 - Step 1: Enroll in Pharmacy Tech program at Waukesha County Technical College.
 - Step 2: Intern via [Handshake](#).
 - Step 3: Gain experience—apply for pharmacist licensure eligibility.
- Outcome: Work as a pharmacy tech while preparing for full licensure; connected to mentors and job opportunities via [Handshake](#).

Summary

By using SMART goals, visual career maps and leveraging Wisconsin's robust pathway ecosystem, you can support ITPs to:

- Navigate licensing timelines and educational requirements
- Connect directly to local training, job portals and bridge programs
- Build intentional, adaptable plans that respect each individual's starting point and aspirations



Chapter 6: Transferable Skills, Credential Evaluation & Related and Alternative Careers

Transferable Skills: A Strengths-Based Foundation

Transferable skills are core competencies that move across professions, industries and contexts. These include both technical and interpersonal strengths such as:

- Diagnostic and technical knowledge
- Supervisory and leadership experience
- Multilingual communication and cross-cultural awareness
- Adaptability, resilience and independent problem-solving

Even if an ITP is not yet licensed or working in their original field, these skills remain deeply relevant to Wisconsin's growing industries such as advanced manufacturing, logistics, education and health services.

Practitioner Strategy:

- Use skills inventories and tools like the O*NET Skills Search: <https://www.onetonline.org/skills/>
- Use the [STAR \(Situation-Task-Action-Result\) Method](#) to reframe global experience in U.S. job-search language
- Highlight skills aligned with [Wisconsin's in-demand occupations](#)

Credential Evaluation: Building a Bridge to U.S. Equivalency

Credential evaluation is one step in a larger system of recognition, especially for employment, education, or licensure. Learn more [here](#) or watch these short videos [here](#).

Three Key Terms to Keep in Mind:

1. Translation – Converting academic documents into English.
2. Evaluation – Assessing educational equivalency (e.g.a bachelor's degree in nursing).
3. Recognition – The decision by an employer, school, or licensing board to accept the credential.

Learn more from Switchboard: [Starting Strong: Integrating Credential Recognition and Career Pathway Support from Day One](#)

Credential evaluation may be necessary for licensure and enrolling in college. It may not be necessary for employment. Because the credential evaluation process can be time

consuming and costly, always refer individuals to the relevant decision-making body (e.g. licensing board or a specific employer) to get the most accurate and updated information on the process and which evaluation provider to go with if needed.

Exploring Related and Alternate Careers in Wisconsin

When re-licensure is delayed or not pursued, related or alternate careers can still offer meaningful, mission-aligned work for ITPs. These roles may offer quicker entry, income stability and long-term advancement. Read more [here](#).

Practitioner Strategy:

- Explore [WTCS](#) short-term programs
- Use [Pathway PlanIt](#) to show stackable credential ladders
- Support parallel planning, thus balancing bridge careers with long-term credential goals

A Note on the Importance of Entrepreneurship

Why Entrepreneurship?

Many ITPs turn to entrepreneurship not only to meet immediate needs, but to leverage their skills and cultural insights in ways that traditional hiring systems may overlook. In Wisconsin, immigrants are twice as likely as U.S.-born residents to start businesses - contributing to job creation, tax revenue and revitalization of local economies.

Why it Matters for Practitioners

Entrepreneurship offers:

- A path to economic self-sufficiency outside of licensing systems
- A way to preserve cultural identity and share global knowledge
- Flexibility for caregivers, parents and those facing language or documentation barriers

Support Strategies:

- Search [WTCS](#) to find a short-term entrepreneurship credential
- Refer ITPs to the [Wisconsin SBDC network](#) for free business planning and mentorship:
- Connect with the [Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation \(WWBIC\)](#) for microloans and inclusive entrepreneurial training: Other great chambers to consider: [WI Latino Chamber of Commerce](#), [Black Chamber of Commerce](#) and others.
- Include entrepreneurship in your career mapping sessions - it may be a parallel or preferred track for some
- Consider convening a [reoccurring network event](#) such as this one in North Texas ,for aspiring and experienced immigrant entrepreneurs.
- To learn more, see the national Welcoming America guide [here](#).



Chapter 7: U.S Workforce Readiness

For [internationally trained professionals \(ITPs\)](#), workforce readiness in the U.S. is more than just having a degree or technical skill. It involves understanding expectations, adapting to workplace norms and gaining meaningful experience in the local context.

As a practitioner, your role is to help ITPs both recognize what they already bring and prepare to meet the realities of the U.S. job market.

What is U.S. Workforce Readiness?

Workforce readiness is the ability to succeed in a professional environment by demonstrating:

- Strong communication and interpersonal skills (including in U.S. English)
- Understanding of U.S. workplace culture and expectations
- Professionalism, time management and adaptability
- Familiarity with job search strategies (resumes, interviews, networking)
- Basic digital skills and comfort with workplace technologies

Practitioner Strategy:

Use intake or career coaching sessions to assess:

- Which [workforce readiness skills](#) the ITP already demonstrates
- Which skills may need targeted development
- Whether additional ESL or digital literacy instruction is needed

Why U.S. Work Experience Matters

“Why does U.S. work experience matter if I already have a career abroad?” It is a fair and often frustrating question for immigrants new to the country.

Here is how you can explain it:

- U.S. employers want evidence that a candidate can adapt to local work norms, communicate clearly in workplace English and collaborate with diverse teams.
- Even highly skilled professionals may need to demonstrate cultural fluency and familiarity with U.S. systems (such as HIPAA, OSHA, project management tools, etc.).
- U.S. experience builds social capital—connections, references and credibility—that help open doors.

Instead of framing this as a deficit, frame it as a bridge: U.S. experience connects global talent with local opportunity.

How ITPs Can Gain U.S. Work Experience

Encourage individuals to view workforce readiness as a journey and to take small but meaningful steps to gain experience while pursuing their long-term goals.

Options Include:

Opportunity Type	Description	Wisconsin Examples
Volunteering	Contributes time while building communication, teamwork, and cultural fluency	Hospitals, food pantries, local schools, libraries, Volunteer Wisconsin: https://www.volunteerwisconsin.org
Internships or Job Shadows	Short-term exposure to workplace environments	Reach out to local employers via chambers of commerce, workforce boards, or community organizations.
Part-Time or Transitional Jobs	Provides immediate income and builds employer references	Health aide, interpreter, administrative support, driver/logistics roles
On-the-Job Training (OJT) or apprenticeships	Earn-while-you-learn roles with employer mentorship	DWD Registered Apprenticeship programs .

Opportunity Type	Description	Wisconsin Examples
		Look for certified pre apprenticeship programs at WTCS here
Bridge or contextualized programs	Combine language training with industry-specific learning	IELCE programs, IET programs



Chapter 8: Networking, Mentoring, and Peer Support

Social capital (the connections, networks and relationships that help individuals navigate systems) is a key success factor for any professional in the U.S. – but harder to build for

immigrants and refugees who are new to the country. [With approximately 80% of jobs to be achieved through networking](#), building social capital is essential to long-term career success.

Practitioner Role: Rebuilding Networks from Scratch

You can help ITPs rebuild their professional and personal networks by:

- Encouraging purposeful networking (informational interviews, professional associations)
- Creating group-based support spaces where ITPs can share strategies and encouragement
- Referring ITPs to formal mentorship programs, especially those designed for immigrants or internationally educated professionals

Networking in Action: Strategies for ITPs

Networking can feel unfamiliar or uncomfortable for many newcomers, particularly when norms differ across cultures. Normalize it by framing networking as relationship-building, not self-promotion.

Practical Networking Tools:

- Teach ITPs how to conduct informational interviews using email templates and simple scripts.
- Help them create or update a LinkedIn profile, showcasing their international education and goals.
- Identify professional associations or regional industry events. For example:
 - Healthcare: Wisconsin Nurses Association, WHEA
 - Engineering: Wisconsin Society of Professional Engineers
 - Education: Wisconsin TESOL, WEAC
- Encourage them to attend Wisconsin job fairs, library career events and local chamber of commerce mixers - even as observers.

Local Connection Hubs:

- [Employ Milwaukee](#)
- [Job Center of Wisconsin Events](#)
- Local Workforce Development Boards ([via DWD regional maps](#))

Mentorship: Unlocking Opportunity and Confidence

Structured mentorship programs can provide ITPs with:

- Field-specific guidance from someone who understands U.S. expectations
- A safe space to ask questions, get feedback and build confidence
- Advocacy and encouragement during challenging transitions

Recommended Resource: [Group Mentoring Toolkit from World Education Services \(WES\)](#). This guide offers a practical model for setting up or supporting group mentoring programs for internationally trained immigrants.

Wisconsin-Specific Examples:

- Community-based organizations (e.g. Literacy Network, International Institute of Wisconsin) often run informal mentoring or coaching sessions
- Encourage collaboration with university affinity groups or alumni associations (UW System, private colleges, Wisconsin technical colleges)
- Some WTCS colleges offer ITP specific programs that may include a mentoring component, and others offer mentoring and coaching programs as part of their student services. Contact your college for more information.

Peer Support: Strength in Shared Experience

In addition to professional mentoring, peer support groups offer emotional resilience, shared strategies and a sense of community. ITPs can:

- Learn about local systems from those further along in the process
- Reduce isolation and anxiety by hearing “You’re not alone”
- Exchange job leads, study tips and credentialing guidance

Practitioner Strategy:

- Facilitate small peer support groups (in-person or virtual) by industry or career goal
- Train alumni ITPs to serve as peer mentors or discussion facilitators
- Co-host community learning circles or “career cafés” through trusted spaces like libraries, religious centers, or adult ed classrooms



Chapter 9: Engaging Employers as Partners

Employment is a critical milestone on the journey of internationally trained professionals (ITPs), but success requires more than helping individuals prepare. It is also helpful if employers are ready to receive and value the experiences and qualifications that immigrants bring. Hiring practices, job descriptions, or biases exclude qualified professionals who were trained outside the U.S.

Why Employer Engagement Matters

Without intentional employer partnerships, ITPs may face:

- Credential requirements that don't reflect actual job needs
- HR systems that screen out non-U.S. experience

- Workplace cultures that assume a single way of communicating or contributing

Yet when employers understand and invest in ITPs, they benefit from:

- Language and cultural fluency to serve diverse customers
- Global business perspectives
- Resilience, adaptability and dedication
- Better retention and loyalty

Remember: Employers are not just job providers. They are ideally allies in building career systems that help employees advance over time.

What Employers Need to Know

- International experience is valuable experience that leads to a more competitive advantage
 1. Translate global skills into U.S. terms
 2. Share candidate stories that highlight leadership, problem-solving, or adaptability
- Credential evaluation is available
 1. Help employers understand that credential evaluation exists and can provide equivalency
 2. Clarify that a U.S. degree is not always necessary for competency
- Licensing timelines may vary
 1. Explain the benefit of temporary roles while candidates work toward licensure
 2. Suggest transitional jobs that support both employer needs and professional goals
- Cultural integration takes time
 1. Offer to support onboarding or provide cultural navigation training
 2. Highlight candidates' willingness to learn and adapt

Strategies for Employer Engagement:

Strategy	Description
Start with champions	Work with employers already interested in hiring ITPs

Provide success stories	Share case studies from similar businesses or sectors
Offer low risk introduction	Suggest job shadowing, internships, or volunteer roles
Educate HR and hiring teams	Facilitate briefings on credential evaluation, transferable skills and potential for bias
Highlight mutual benefit	Frame partnerships as good for business, brand and workforce goals

Practitioner Tool: Inclusive Hiring Checklist for Employers

This checklist can be adapted for use in meetings, employer guides, or workforce board presentations.

- Job descriptions focus on skills, not just U.S.-based credentials
- Applicants are not screened out due to unfamiliar school names
- Interviewers are trained on cross-cultural communication styles
- Opportunities exist for job trials, apprenticeships, or bridge roles
- Existing staff understand the value of hiring ITPs

Moving Beyond Individual Placement

Long-term success for ITPs means changing not just one workplace, but the expectations and systems that define workforce participation. Practitioners can:

- Connect with local workforce boards
- Offer to attend meetings to share with local businesses and communities the advantages of hiring ITPs Partner with chambers of commerce, employer associations and industry leaders

Highlight Success Stories and Proven Models

Employers may be more receptive if they see what has worked elsewhere. Two replicable models include:

African Bridge Network – Internationally Trained Health Fellowship Model (Massachusetts)

African Bridge Network created a 12-week fellowship program that places internationally trained health professionals—including nurses—into observation and mentorship roles

within U.S. hospitals. Fellows gain hands-on exposure and local work references, while employers benefit from diverse, motivated talent. Learn more: [African Bridge Network Fellowship](#)

CNA-to-RN Pipelines in Wisconsin

Several Wisconsin health care employers already invest in internal advancement pathways—supporting entry-level workers like Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) through tuition reimbursement, shift flexibility and access to technical college programs. These models work especially well for internationally educated nurses who start in support roles while working toward U.S. licensure.

[Aspirus Paid CNA Training Program](#)

In partnership with Mid-State Technical College and other regional colleges, Aspirus Health Care offers a paid CNA program. Participants receive full tuition, materials, scrubs, a stipend, and are guaranteed employment at Aspirus upon completion. This customized training includes clinical placement at local hospitals and launched in locations such as Wisconsin Rapids and Stevens Point.

[North Shore Health & WisCaregiver Careers Program](#)

North Shore Health collaborates with WisCaregiver Careers to offer free CNA training, paid during training hours and a \$500 retention bonus after six months of employment. The program includes tuition reimbursement for those progressing toward LPN or RN study.



Chapter 11: Resources for Asset Mapping and Partnering

As a practitioner supporting [internationally trained professionals \(ITPs\)](#), you are not working alone—you are part of a broader ecosystem that must be aligned, responsive and informed by the voices of those we serve. This chapter is your charter to lead local efforts that build connected pathways through intentional asset mapping and cross-sector collaboration.

ITPs face multiple barriers - not just to employment, but to inclusion. These barriers span workforce systems, education access, credential recognition, language learning, and basic needs support. Our collective job is to identify, strengthen and connect the resources that already exist in our communities.

What You Can Do: Activate Asset Mapping

Asset mapping is more than an inventory- it can act as a strategic tool for:

- Identifying existing services and organizational strengths
- Spotting critical gaps in licensure navigation, language support, or wraparound services (e.g. childcare, transportation)

- Building integrated referral and co-enrollment pathways across systems
- Weaving stronger ties between workforce boards, colleges, employers, and community-based partners

Use Asset Mapping Tools

World Education Services provides a practical, adaptable guide for communities to map assets and identify needs.

[WES Asset Mapping Resource: Mapping Assets and Identifying Gaps](#)

Use this tool to:

- Facilitate conversations with local partners
- Collect data on existing supports for ITNs
- Analyze service duplication or absence by area or sector
- Develop shared goals and referral pathways

Mapping Partners in Wisconsin

As you develop your asset map, consider including partners like:

Sector	Examples to Include
Job Centers (WIOA)	Local workforce development boards and training coordinators
Community-Based Organizations	Immigrant/refugee support organizations such as Catholic Charities, International Institute of Wisconsin, or Latino Academy
Health Care Employers	Hospitals and nursing homes like Aspirus and North Shore Health
Adult Education & Literacy	ESL, IET, or bridge programs run by literacy organizations or technical colleges
Peer/Migrant Networks	Mentorship programs from immigrant-led associations or professional groups like the Wisconsin Nurses Foundation

As you look at available programs consider visiting the [World Education Services Program Map](#). Encourage partners to add their programming to the map if they are not yet listed. This can help develop an easily accessible network of programs and initiatives that support the economic inclusion of immigrants and refugees.

Additional Asset to Leverage: The CARE Network

Milwaukee Area Technical College is connected to the CARE (College Achievement Resource Effort) Network, an initiative that supports students with basic needs, mental health and holistic wraparound services.

CARE Network supports include:

- Housing and food assistance referrals
- Childcare and transportation coordination
- Mental health resources
- Access to emergency funds or community grants
- Case management to help students stay enrolled and complete programs

Learn more about student support infrastructure: [WTCS Student Support Overview](#)

Adapt Wisconsin's WIC Outreach Planning Framework

The [Wisconsin WIC Outreach Planning Guide \(PDF\)](#) provides a solid model for structuring outreach plans. While designed for health services, its logic applies well to building a resource network for ITPs:

- Define target population – specify which ITP communities (e.g. Ukrainian engineers in Milwaukee, Afghan refugee nurses in Madison)
- Map community and partner assets – local nonprofits, language support agencies, professional licensure boards
- Set outreach goals and methods – workshops, networking events, information sessions
- Track engagement and success metrics

Adapting this framework can help you build structured, replicable local networks aligned with successful workforce development.

Wisconsin-Specific Outreach / Networking Contact List Template

A practical, fillable spreadsheet or Airtable-style directory to organize your outreach and partnerships:

Field	Description / Example
Organization/Contact Name	e.g. "International Institute of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Office"
Primary Contact & Role	e.g. "Sarah Patel, Career Pathways Coordinator"
Language(s) Supported	e.g. "Spanish, Arabic, Mandarin"
Services Offered	e.g. "Credential evaluation, job placement, mentorship"
Target Professions	e.g. "Nurses, Teachers, Engineers"
Email Address	
Phone Number	
Website / Sign-up Link	
Region / Coverage Area	e.g. "Milwaukee County" or "Statewide"
Engagement Status	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Contacted <input type="checkbox"/> Contacted <input type="checkbox"/> Follow-up <input type="checkbox"/> Active Partner
Notes / Next Steps	

Instructions:

1. Start locally: Add state-level entities like [Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services \(DPS\)](#), or [Job Center of Wisconsin](#).
2. Expand network: Include refugee resettlement agencies, community organizations, cultural associations (e.g. [Hmong Wisconsin Chamber of Commerce](#)), and English language providers.
3. Segment by profession: Tailor outreach by licensing needs (e.g. nurses vs. engineers).
4. Update regularly: Check in monthly to add, verify, or remove resources.

3. How to Use This Model in Your Work

1. Download the template into Excel, Google Sheets, or Airtable
2. Gather initial contacts using resources like:
 - [Job Center of Wisconsin Directory of Workforce Services](#)
 - [Wisconsin Literacy Provider Directory](#)
 - [Refugee Resettlement Agencies](#)
3. Conduct outreach using short, personalized emails or calls to introduce your services and propose collaboration
4. Record each interaction under Engagement Status and Notes
5. Schedule monthly check-ins with active partners
6. Share your resource directory with ITP clients, either digitally or as a printed referral map

Other Ways to Build Effective Partnerships

Use one of the tools discussed above (such as the asset map or airtable) to facilitate action. Try this sequence:

1. Host a Stakeholder Convening: Share your asset map and identify mutual goals.
2. Include ITPs: Lived experience keeps the focus on real barriers and real opportunities.
3. Clarify Roles: Determine who leads on ESL, who mentors, who engages employers, etc.
4. Pilot a Model: Start small-a bridge-to-licensure program, an employer cohort, a job-shadowing initiative, or a [group mentoring model](#).
5. Evaluate and Scale: Build feedback loops and adjust based on practitioner and ITP insights.

Sample Partner Spotlight: United Way as a Network-Weaver

Across Wisconsin, United Way organizations play a unique role in convening multisector collaborations. They can help:

- Coordinate local roundtables to bring together employers, colleges and immigrant-serving groups

- Fund pilot initiatives like re-credentialing cohorts or sector-specific career coaching
- Amplify storytelling and impact data to engage local decision-makers
- Connect isolated efforts across counties or regions to prevent duplication
- Connect families to basic needs support through [211 services](#)

United Way's deep community presence and funding flexibility make them ideal partners in systems alignment.

Find your local chapter: [United Way of Wisconsin](#)

Your Role as a Connector

As a practitioner, you are not only a service provider-you are a systems builder. Use this charter to:

- Lead with collaboration
- Center ITP voices
- Map and activate partnerships
- Leverage student and community support networks
- Pilot programs that respond to real needs
- Share back what works
- Celebrate successes