

# English Upskilling Powers Local Workforces & Economies, Builds Cohesive Communities

## A Blueprint from Colorado for At-Scale Impact

**In Colorado, 1 in 8 workers is an immigrant or refugee – and 42% of these workers are English learners.** The Colorado Office of New Americans (ONA), part of the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, tapped EnGen to deliver workforce-aligned English upskilling at scale across the state, unlocking the potential of this multilingual labor force<sup>1</sup>.



The Colorado ONA invested \$700,000 to provide 4,000 EnGen licenses to local workers. Cost-benefit analysis points to a **\$7 return for every \$1 invested** in the Colorado program. EnGen's at-scale work in Colorado added nearly \$4.7M to the local economy in the form of increased wages, local spending, job creation, and tax revenues<sup>2</sup>.

The EnGen offering was part of Colorado's Virtual Career-Aligned English as a Second Language (VCESL) program, designed to upskill incumbent workers and address staffing shortages in essential sectors like healthcare, hospitality, and manufacturing. Throughout the 2023-2024 fiscal year, EnGen served thousands of Colorado workers via nearly 50 different local partners, including local employers, community colleges, libraries, workforce centers, and other local nonprofit organizations.

Results from a survey of 250 of Colorado EnGen learners<sup>3</sup> speak to the power of at-scale English upskilling programs to connect local employers with high-potential talent pools, advancing workers' career mobility, and building more cohesive local communities. Five insights from EnGen's work with the Colorado ONA offer a blueprint to be replicated at scale in other states across the country.

<sup>1</sup>For full background on EnGen's work with the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment's Office of New Americans (ONA), see the ONA's "[Virtual, Career-Aligned English as a Second Language Program](#)" report, released September 2024.

<sup>2</sup>The 7x ROI for EnGen's partnership with the Colorado ROI was higher than average. [Cost-benefit analysis](#) indicates an average return of \$6 to local economies for every \$1 invested in the platform.

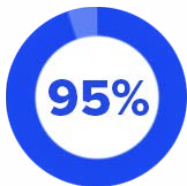
<sup>3</sup>The survey was distributed to the approximately 1,600 EnGen learners who had engaged with EnGen when surveys were distributed in January and June, 2024. Response rate was approximately 15%.

## INSIGHT 1

### English upskilling supports local employers and powers local workforces.

Nearly 1 in 10 working-age adults in the U.S. is an English learner<sup>4</sup>, yet this workforce is largely untapped by local employers, driving staffing shortages and turnover. In Colorado, career-aligned English upskilling drove employee retention, productivity, and promotion.

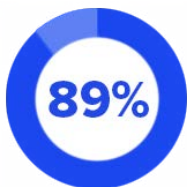
Offering these programs at scale holds potential to bolster labor force participation in local workforces across the country.



of Colorado EnGen learners reported **improved confidence in speaking English**



**saved time** at work



**improved** their job skills



**achieved a real-world goal**, like a pay raise or promotion

“English learners are a very important part of the overall operations of our business. We wanted to provide a way to increase English comprehension in a user-friendly format that fit into the busy schedules of our team. [With EnGen], many of our employees have increased their English comprehension in a matter of months. Communication has greatly improved across our organization.”

- Alison Torres, HR Business Partner,  
Leiters Health

**Leiters Health**  
QUALITY COMPOUNDING FOR LIFE™



### Here's what Colorado EnGen learners had to say:

“I got a **pay increase and promotion** to gold level.”

“They are **putting me in charge** of a construction project.”

“I got a **really good job offer.**”

“I became **more comfortable** at business meetings.”

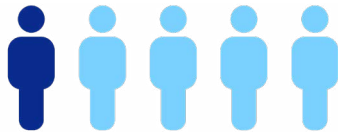
<sup>4</sup>Jill H. Wilson, “Investing in English Skills: The Limited English Proficient Workforce in U.S. Metropolitan Areas,” Brookings, September, 24, 2014.

## INSIGHT 2

### English upskilling opens pathways to new credentials, certifications, and careers.

English skills are essential workforce skills that connect workers with other high-demand job skills – including digital literacy, which is required for a full 92% of jobs in the U.S.<sup>5</sup>

In Colorado, EnGen’s career-aligned instruction also helped workers access other upskilling pathways to earn professional certifications, credentials, and degrees.



1 in 5 said they started a job training program or **earned a new credential or professional certification**

“The program helped me polish my English vocabulary in the field of medicine, which gave me the confidence to interview for a new job as a medical assistant. I’m now back to work in the healthcare field, which is an important first step in my career journey here.”

- Genesis, a physician from Venezuela who used EnGen to restart her medical career in Colorado.



### Here’s what Colorado EnGen learners had to say:

“I am in the process of obtaining **certification** as a medical assistant.”

“I am going to finish high school and **learn computer science.**”

“EnGen helped me to **improve my email writing skills** and now **I can talk confidently in meetings** and in public places.”

“Thanks to EnGen **I know the different parts of a computer** and [can] do some exercises in English by [typing] the answers myself.”

<sup>5</sup>Amanda Bergson-Shilcock, Roderick Taylor, and Nyerere “Nye” Hodge, “Closing the Digital Skill Divide: The Payoff for Workers, Business, and the Economy,” National Skills Coalition, February 6, 2023.

## INSIGHT 3

### Mobile-first English upskilling offers training at the scale needed to serve local employers and employees alike.

The U.S. workforce system currently serves the needs of just 4% of adult English learners<sup>6</sup>, speaking to the need for investments in high-impact, highly scalable solutions to close the gap.

In Colorado, the VCESL program allowed small- and medium-sized businesses in the hospitality, food service, tourism and construction sectors to access EnGen free of charge for their employees, engaging workers who would not have otherwise had access to instruction. Likewise, access to EnGen bolstered capacity at community-based nonprofits and adult education providers to offer highly personalized, career-aligned instruction.

Our survey points to the potential of mobile-first, AI-powered instruction to more effectively serve workers than traditional approaches to language learning.



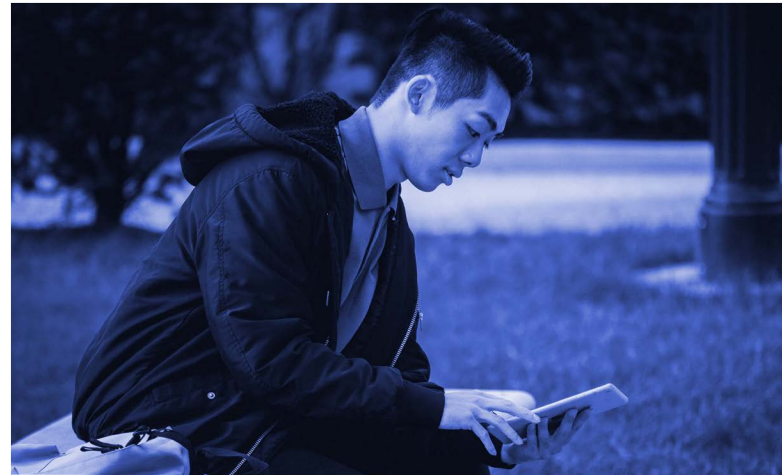
3 in 4 Colorado learners said **EnGen helped them more than traditional, classroom-based approach**

“With over 2,300 Mesa County residents struggling to speak English fluently, we face both a challenge and an incredible opportunity. EnGen is the only platform we have used that has offered the depth of content and scaffolding to match the career and postsecondary interests of students participating in our program.”

- Emily McConnell, Head of Adult Learning, Mesa County Libraries



**Mesa County LIBRARIES**



## Here’s what Colorado EnGen learners had to say:

“When I started my job, the [EnGen] engineering lessons **helped me more than the training** I received at the company.”

“In face-to-face courses, you hear very little English, because there are only short phrases and sentences. **In EnGen, they [use] real-life audios, without pauses and as you hear them.**”

“**At EnGen they give me what I want to know.** In the classroom everything is general. If what interests me is about health, I [can get] it with EnGen.”

<sup>6</sup>Margie McHugh and Catrina Doxsee, “English Plus Integration: Shifting the Instructional Paradigm for Immigrant Adult Learners to Support Integration Success,” Migration Policy Institute, October 2018.

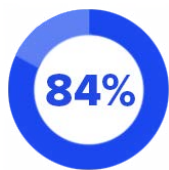
## INSIGHT 4

### English upskilling supports newcomers' civic engagement and social inclusion.

From better communication with their children's teachers to stronger community connections to increased civic engagement, adults have a variety of real-world motivations for learning English.

English upskilling helps power social inclusion outside of work – and, in turn, these connections benefit local workforces and economies. Workers seek out companies that prioritize their dignity and agency<sup>7</sup>, along with their health and happiness<sup>8</sup>. When workers can access these tools at work, they're more likely to stay with local employers.

In Colorado, the opportunity to connect with EnGen drove tangible benefits across communities.



84% of Colorado EnGen learners agree that they **could navigate life better, are more engaged with their community**, and can help their family more.

"I feel I can go to the grocery store and ask for help. Or go to the hospital: Last week, I called my insurance to ask for an appointment, and I could do it. I'm a little shy sometimes, but now I feel more confidence."

- Aileve, a Colorado EnGen learner who says learning English benefitted her at work and at home



## Here's what Colorado EnGen learners had to say:

“At my child’s [school] conferences, **I no longer needed to ask for an interpreter** to communicate with his teachers.”

“I have new friends now, they speak just English and with my English from EnGen **I feel very confident.**”

“I have been **participating in a social group** related to women’s entrepreneurship.”

“I am a volunteer at the library and **I help out sometimes in the citizenship class.**”

<sup>7</sup>Sarah Miller, Merissa Piazza, Ashley Putnam, and Kristen Broady, “[Worker Voices: Shifting perspectives and expectations on employment](#),” Fed Communities. May 24, 2023.

<sup>8</sup>Kara Dennison, “[Why Companies Should Prioritize Employee Health And Happiness In 2024](#),” Forbes, October 24, 2023.

## INSIGHT 5

### State investment lays the foundation for sustained at-scale workforce inclusion.

Investing public funds in English upskilling supports the creation of a cross-sector local ecosystem that can help sustain at-scale language instruction and advance workforce inclusion. Following the year-long VCESL program funded via the Colorado ONA, growing numbers of Colorado-based organizations – representing employers, nonprofits, and adult education institutions – continue to invest in English upskilling programs to meet ongoing demand from local workers.



8 in 10 Colorado learners surveyed left positive comments about EnGen, many indicating **a strong desire to continue with the program**

“As a community-based nonprofit, it can be difficult for us to gain the funds to purchase platforms like EnGen. When we learned that the state was planning to purchase bulk licenses to serve Coloradans, we jumped on board as soon as possible.”

- Allie Needham, Senior Program Manager,  
Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning



## Here’s what Colorado EnGen learners had to say:

“I am very grateful for this program and I hope that I will have the opportunity to use it in the future.”

“I love the [approach] that EnGen uses to teach. I hope to have the opportunity to continue learning with EnGen.”

“Keep giving me the opportunity to continue with [EnGen].”



### MOVING FORWARD

As conveners of employers, adult education institutions, and workforce development organizations, state and local governments play a unique role in fostering economic mobility and opportunity in local communities and economies. **Learn how partnering with EnGen can help build a local workforce ecosystem that champions multilingual workers and creates new talent pools for local employers.**