

Advancing Global Careers: An Analysis of NCDA International Advocacy Visibility and International Member Needs

2026 NCDA Leadership Academy - Leadership Action Learning Project

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Goal and Purpose of This Study

This Action Learning Project investigates the strategic intersection of global career development needs and institutional advocacy within the National Career Development Association (NCDA). Positioned directly within the mandate of the 2024–2027 NCDA Strategic Plan, specifically Goal 3 (Advocacy), this study diagnosed the visibility, efficacy, and relevance of NCDA's current advocacy frameworks through the eyes of its diverse international membership. A foundational insight from this study is that "international advocacy" is not a monolith since different members identify as 'international' and that international members have nuanced needs.

Research Questions

To achieve its objective, this project investigated five core research questions:

1. What are the needs of NCDA members with regard to helping them in their ability to advise and support international students and clients in their professional roles?
2. What specific NCDA advocacy efforts are most visible to its members and career development practitioners?
3. How do NCDA members rate their level of engagement and connection with NCDA's current advocacy efforts?
4. What are the perceived strengths and weaknesses of NCDA's current advocacy strategies based on the identified needs of the membership?
5. How do the perceptions of NCDA's advocacy efforts differ between US-based members and foreign-based members?

Research Design

This project deployed a mixed-methods survey research design employing a survey with 41 respondents. Central to this study's design was the foundational hypothesis that the term "international" alludes to a multi-dimensional identity transcending the location of members. The survey design allowed participants to identify themselves to ensure a multi-dimensional perspective on what constituted an "international" professional.

Interpretation and Discussion of Findings

Survey results confirmed the hypothesis that the term "international" encompasses several distinct categories of professionals rather than representing a single monolithic demographic based on location alone. From a target sample of 41 respondents, responses were captured from a diverse

global practitioner matrix. The largest segment consisted of domestic (U.S.-born) career service professionals operating within the United States at 43.90% (n=18), followed closely by foreign-born career development professionals operating primarily outside the U.S. at 31.71% (n=13). Additionally, foreign-born professionals operating domestically within the U.S. made up 17.07% (n=6) of the sample, while the remaining 7.32% (n=3) identified as domestic professionals operating abroad or in specialized "Other" functional areas.

The empirical results revealed a clear disconnect within the association's outreach and visibility structures:

- **The Passive Engagement Gap:** A critical 90% of total respondents formally characterized their interaction with NCDA's advocacy as less than actively engaged.
- **The Silhouette Effect:** While members highly recognized static, localized structural components, such as the historical position papers of the ISSC or NCDA's credentialing competencies, the active, public-facing systemic advocacy voice of NCDA remained virtually invisible to the global cohort.
- **Geographic Perception Divergence:**
 - **U.S.-Based Practitioners** reported frontline systemic bottlenecks. They expressed deep frustration regarding host-country regulatory constraints, visa backlogs (CPT/OPT), H-1B lottery cap pressures, and localized hiring discrimination.
 - **International-Based Practitioners** reported a major macro-model disconnect. They critiqued the overwhelming "U.S.-centric worldview" embedded within standard materials, noting that traditional models failed to map onto distinct overseas labor markets or alleviate the acute mental health challenges of cross-border transitions, such as reverse culture shock.

Recommendations

To transform these operational challenges into sustainable institutional growth, the study recommended that NCDA adopt these strategic action plans:

- **Advocate for Work Sponsorship and Visa Pathways:**
 1. The NCDA should prioritize public-facing policy initiatives that advocate for humane regulatory constraints, H-1B lottery cap pressures, protection of critical visa pathways, and localized hiring discrimination.
 2. To effectively address these systemic bottlenecks, NCDA must include working directly with the Government Relations Committee, as well as the Global Connections Committee (GCC) and the International Student Services Committee (ISCC), to develop targeted resources, platforms, and advocacy actions.
- **Develop Specialized Legal and Regulatory Toolkits:**
 3. As a foundational step, the NCDA should actively promote and expand the visibility of

existing materials, such as NCDA ISSC's 'Resources for Partnering with International Students' guide, utilizing it as a baseline to build more comprehensive, legally vetted toolkits for practitioners.

4. The organization should curate advanced practitioner toolkits featuring guidance from legal experts on equal opportunity employment laws and international student hiring processes in the form of webinars and resource guides.

- **Leverage Diverse Cultural Perspectives:**

5. The NCDA must actively utilize the distinct cultural lenses international professionals bring to the field. Simultaneously, by elevating the voices of foreign-born practitioners operating domestically, for example, through ISSC and GCC, the NCDA can gain critical insights into how immigrants perceive U.S. career development, enabling the design of more culturally adaptive resources.
6. Dedicate a special issue within Career Development Quarterly (CDQ) to research applying career development theories globally. Similarly, utilize the Career Developments magazine to highlight the work global members are doing and focus on practitioner interventions utilizing diverse cultural perspectives.

- **Standardize and Market Global Credentialing Architecture:**

7. The data highlighted a need to address localized brand equity gaps where certifications like the Certified Career Services Provider (CCSP) lost commercial utility to regional equivalents (e.g. CDA in Taiwan).

- **Institutionalize Equitable Community Building:**

8. It was advised to dismantle structural gatekeeping by implementing a tiered, equitable membership and conference fee schedule scaled to regional economic indices, enabling virtual networking hubs, academies, and masterclasses across diverse global time zones (e.g., Australia and New Zealand).

- **Expand Cross-Border Resource Toolkits:**

9. The study proposed curating and distributing advanced, multilingual practitioner toolkits (e.g. Spanish and Arabic) designed to mitigate the unique cultural and migratory trauma experienced by globally mobile populations.
10. There is a call for globally adaptable frameworks that can be tailored to specific regional contexts, such as West Asia and the Gulf Cooperation Council region, while still maintaining alignment with international best practices.

In conclusion, the findings of this study recommend that NCDA must transition from exporting a U.S.-centric advocacy model to facilitating an equitable exchange of global knowledge. Ultimately, by prioritizing international advocacy and embracing these targeted recommendations, the NCDA can continue to elevate professional practice and empower human potential on a truly global scale.