

# *Investing in Our Communities: Strategies for Immigrant Integration*



## **A TOOLKIT FOR GRANTMAKERS**

### *Executive Summary*

**GRANTMAKERS  
CONCERNED WITH  
IMMIGRANTS  
AND REFUGEES**

# ABOUT GRANTMAKERS CONCERNED WITH IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

**Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees (GCIR)** seeks to move the philanthropic field to advance the contributions and address the needs of the world's growing and increasingly diverse immigrant and refugee populations. With a core focus on the United States, GCIR provides grantmakers with opportunities for learning, networking, and collaboration. Our information resources aim to:

- Enhance philanthropy's awareness of issues affecting immigrants and refugees.
- Deepen the field's understanding of how these issues are integral to community building in today's dynamic social, economic, and political environment.
- Increase philanthropic support for both broad and immigrant/refugee-focused strategies that benefit newcomer populations and strengthen the larger society.

Today's complex demographic, social, and economic trends make understanding immigration-related issues critically

important to all grantmakers, regardless of their geographic focus or issue priorities. In response, GCIR helps funders connect immigrant issues to their funding priorities by serving as a forum to:

- Learn about current issues through in-depth analyses, research reports, and online data, tools, and resources tailored specifically for grantmakers.
- Connect with other funders through programs, briefings, and conferences that examine major immigration trends and how they impact diverse communities.
- Collaborate with grantmaking colleagues on strategies that strengthen immigrant-related funding locally and nationally.

In 2007, an estimated 1,500 funders participated our programs and took advantage of our information resources.

For more information, visit [www.gcir.org](http://www.gcir.org) or contact the GCIR office at [info@gcir.org](mailto:info@gcir.org) or 707.824.4374.

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## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Immigration is an enduring hallmark of the United States, helping drive economic growth and defining national identity since the country's founding.

Although the United States has benefited greatly from immigration, it has always been fundamentally ambivalent about newcomers and their role in society. This ambivalence has created

**The hard work and aspirations of people from diverse backgrounds have made America the land of opportunity: a nation renowned for self-reliance, freedom, and democracy.**

formidable challenges for immigrants throughout the course of U.S. history, whether they hail from Europe, Africa, Asia, Latin America, or the Middle East.

Nevertheless, the majority of immigrants across the generations—overcoming poverty, discrimination, and other barriers to integration—have successfully pursued the American Dream, bettered their lives and those of their children, and enriched American society in the process. Similarly, other groups, such as Native Americans and African-Americans, have endured enormous hardships and have contributed significantly to the nation's prosperity. The hard work and aspirations of people from diverse

backgrounds have made America the land of opportunity: a nation renowned for self-reliance, freedom, and democracy.

## CONTEMPORARY IMPERATIVES

Today, as in the past, immigrants continue to play a vital role in our society. As native birth rates continue to decline and as the Baby Boom generation begins to retire, immigrants and their children—as workers, taxpayers, consumers, and entrepreneurs—will become even more critical to U.S. economic vitality and global competitiveness.

**Many American communities are increasingly recognizing that immigrants, regardless of their immigration status, are vital to local economies and are part of the social and cultural fabric.**

Many American communities are increasingly recognizing that immigrants, regardless of their immigration status, are vital to local economies and are part of the social and cultural fabric. Together with longtime residents, newcomers can contribute to community problem solving and help address long-standing social issues like poverty and racial inequities. Efforts to integrate

immigrants can strengthen our society as a whole.

The unprecedented level of migration around the world, the high volume of immigration to the United States, and immigrants' expanding role in American society create strong imperatives for immigrant integration. To continue

thriving as a nation, the United States must be intentional about weaving newcomers into the fabric of society and

creating opportunities for them to work with native-born residents on shared goals and interests. How well we integrate immigrants and provide opportunities for all community members has far-reaching implications for—and is inextricable from—our current and future vitality.

### THE USE OF "IMMIGRANT" AND "NEWCOMER" IN THIS REPORT

This report uses "immigrant" and "newcomer" to generally describe a foreign-born person living in the United States, regardless of their immigration status or whether they have become U.S. citizens.

## GCIR'S IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION FRAMEWORK

### DEFINITION

GCIR defines immigrant integration as a dynamic, two-way process in which newcomers and the receiving society work together to build secure, vibrant, and cohesive communities. We utilize the term “integration” rather than “assimilation” to emphasize respect for and incorporation of differences, the importance of mutual adaptation, and an appreciation of diversity.

As an intentional effort, immigrant integration engages and transforms all community stakeholders, reaping shared benefits and creating a new whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Mutual responsibility and benefits, multi-sector involvement, and multi-strategy approach are the cornerstones of GCIR's Immigrant Integration Framework.

**As an intentional effort, immigrant integration engages and transforms all community stakeholders, reaping shared benefits and creating a new whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.**

The actions immigrants take, the resources they possess, and the reception and supports they receive from the host community are key determinants of successful integration. The engagement of all stakeholders in the newcomer and receiving communities, as well as those who bridge the two, is also critical to the integration process. All sectors of society—including government, nonprofit, business, labor, faith, and philanthropy—have a self-interested stake in promoting immigrant integration.

*“Our nation's immigration policy must be consistent with humanitarian values and with the need to treat all individuals with respect and dignity.... Problems with the immigration system cannot be resolved without looking at the larger economic needs... such as the creation of job training programs and small business programs, as well as federal education assistance so that all Americans can have enhanced opportunities.”*

—Bruce S. Gordon  
President & CEO, NAACP, 2006

### SIX PATHWAYS

GCIR's Immigrant Integration Framework identifies six strategic pathways through which immigrants and the receiving community can work together to provide resources and opportunities and leverage the human capital that immigrants bring:

- Communitywide planning.
- Language and education.
- Health, well-being, and economic mobility.
- Equal treatment and opportunity.
- Social and cultural interaction.
- Civic participation and citizenship.

These pathways serve both as a tool for facilitating integration and as a means to assess whether integration is taking place successfully. They interact dynamically, each with the power to reinforce or weaken progress in the other areas. For example, language and education are highly correlated with economic mobility but are also a determining factor in health care access, citizenship and civic participation, and interaction with native-born residents. Similarly, unequal treatment can threaten not only economic mobility but also immigrants' ability to access critically needed services and to participate in democracy.

Immigrant integration as a framework holds considerable promise to guide the development of program, policy, and funding priorities to build a stronger, more cohesive society to benefit all members. To reap the full benefits of integration, however, U.S. society must invest in building a system to welcome immigrants, support their integration into the social and economic fabric, and value their cultural and linguistic diversity. Any investment in immigrant integration, however, should be made as part of broader community-building efforts. In so doing, our nation can live up to its reputation as the land of opportunity where people of all color, cultural background, and walks of life can put down roots and build a shared community together, now and in the future.

# Immigrant Integration: A Framework to Strengthen Community

**DEFINITION:** Immigrant integration is a dynamic, two-way process in which newcomers and the receiving society work together to build secure, vibrant, and cohesive communities. As an intentional effort, integration engages and transforms all community members, reaping shared benefits and creating a new whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Mutual responsibility, multi-sector involvement, and multi-strategy approach are the cornerstones of GCIR's Immigrant Integration Framework. These elements are critical to any effort to weave newcomers into the fabric of our communities.

## Why Now: The Imperatives for Integration

The confluence of demographic, economic, social, and political factors creates imperatives for immigrant integration. To continue thriving as a nation, the United States must be intentional about weaving newcomers into the fabric of society. How well we integrate immigrants and provide opportunities for all members has far-reaching implications for—and is inextricable from—our current and future vitality.

### DEMOGRAPHIC

- **Global migration is a growing phenomenon that shows no signs of abating.** This trend has enormous implications for the United States as a top migrant-receiving country.
- **Growth, diversity, and dispersion of newcomer populations create opportunities** to address longstanding social issues, improve racial and ethnic equity and cohesion, and strengthen our democratic traditions.

### ECONOMIC

- **Current and future U.S. economic growth and stability depend on immigrants** who help address labor market shortages, revitalize declining urban and rural communities, and expand U.S. global competitiveness.
- **Immigrants and their children—as workers, taxpayers, consumers, and entrepreneurs—will become even more critical to U.S. economic vitality**, as native birth rates continue to decline and as the Baby Boom generation begins to retire.

### SOCIAL & CIVIC

- **Policies intended to affect only immigrants have a direct impact on many American families and communities** because 85 percent of immigrant families have mixed immigration status and 75 percent of children of immigrants are U.S. citizens.
- **Policy changes in the past decade erode core American values and affect the ability of immigrants to integrate** by curtailing their civil rights and limiting their eligibility for publicly funded health and social services.

## Pathways to Integration

Through these six strategic pathways, all stakeholders can work together to leverage immigrants' human capital to the benefit of our entire society. Immigrant integration efforts can draw upon myriad strategies from organizing and advocacy to research and communications.

### NEWCOMER COMMUNITY ↔ RECEIVING COMMUNITY

#### Communitywide Planning

*Intentional and inclusive planning allows newcomers and longtime residents to work together to facilitate immigrant integration and promote overall safety, health, and well-being of communities.*

Seek opportunities to participate actively in ↔ Systematically engage newcomers in community planning endeavors

#### Language & Education

*Eliminating language barriers, promoting English proficiency, and providing education opportunities are key to successful integration.*

Learn English while maintaining ↔ Offer quality English classes; native language ensure language access

Utilize and support school system ↔ Provide equitable access to quality education

#### Health, Well-being, & Economic Mobility

*Programs that promote well-being and economic mobility are essential to helping immigrants establish a foothold and to strengthening the broader community.*

Be self-sufficient and support family ↔ Provide services that support self-sufficiency, e.g., job training, health care, housing

Contribute to the economy by working, ↔ Offer access to training opportunities, living-wage paying taxes, and starting new businesses jobs, and support for entrepreneurship

#### Equal Treatment & Opportunity

*Fair laws and policies are critical building blocks for successful integration.*

Be responsible, contributing community ↔ Enact and enforce laws that promote equal treatment and opportunity and provide resources to protect newcomers' rights, e.g., legal assistance and opportunity for all

#### Social & Cultural Interaction

*Such interaction fosters understanding, creates a sense of belonging, and facilitates mutual engagement.*

Adapt to a new culture without losing identity ↔ Learn about and respect diverse cultures

Engage with longtime residents ↔ Engage with newcomers to find common ground to find common ground

#### Citizenship & Civic Participation

*Opportunities for newcomers to participate in civic life are vital to integration.*

Commit to new community, learn about civic ↔ Promote citizenship, opportunities for processes, engage in life of broader community community participation, and right to organize

## Benefits of Integration

Through strong leadership by and collaboration among all stakeholder groups, including philanthropy, immigrant integration holds the potential to create:

- **A vibrant, cohesive society shared** and valued by established and newcomer residents of different experiences, histories, ethnicities, and backgrounds.
- **The revitalization of declining communities** through the contributions of immigrant families working in tandem with their native-born neighbors.
- **Stronger communities with the ability to meet wide-ranging needs:** address racial, ethnic, and economic diversity; and enrich the social and cultural fabric of our society.
- **Increased productivity and a robust economy** through an expanded base of workers, consumers, taxpayers, and entrepreneurs.
- **Global competitiveness** through a multi-lingual, multi-cultural workforce.
- **A more vibrant democracy** in which all groups are accepted as equal members of society with the opportunity—and responsibility—to engage and contribute to the common good.
- **A more secure America** where all members of society—regardless of race, national origin, or socio-economic status—live in dignity and equality.

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## BENEFITS OF INTEGRATION

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The potential benefits of successful immigrant integration to the broader society are significant:

- A vibrant, cohesive society shared and valued by established and newcomer residents of different experiences, histories, ethnicities, and backgrounds.
- Revitalization of declining communities through the contributions of immigrant families working in tandem with their native-born neighbors.
- Stronger communities with the ability to meet wide-ranging needs; address racial, ethnic, and economic diversity; and enrich the social and cultural fabric of our society.
- Increased productivity and a robust economy through an expanded base of workers, consumers, taxpayers, and entrepreneurs.
- Global competitiveness through a multi-lingual, multi-cultural workforce.
- A more vibrant democracy in which all groups are accepted as equal members of society with the opportunity—and responsibility—to engage and contribute to the common good.
- A more secure America where all members of society—regardless of race, national origin, or socio-economic status—live in dignity and equality.

*“The Chamber strongly supports immigration and believes that immigrants are a driving force in our economy, both filling and creating jobs. They are also our best hope to curb chronic American labor shortages.”*

**—Thomas J. Donohue  
President & CEO  
U.S. Chamber of Commerce,  
which represents over three  
million businesses**

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## ROLE FOR PHILANTHROPY

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The successful integration of immigrants in the early twentieth century was shaped significantly by U.S. philanthropy, which played a leadership role, along with social reformers and others, to build public libraries, reform school systems, and enact health and workplace safety laws. In large part, these and other reform measures sought to help cushion immigrants from crushing urban poverty and to facilitate their move up in U.S. society.

In one of the most well-known examples, steel magnate Andrew Carnegie founded nearly 1,700 public libraries—the backbone of the U.S. public library infrastructure—so that children with no access to formal schooling could educate themselves and advance, as he, an impoverished Scottish immigrant, had done.

More than a century later, U.S. philanthropy is in a strong and unique position to respond to the demographic, economic, and social imperatives of immigrant integration. Foundations can consider a range of grantmaking strategies depending on their funding approaches, issue priorities, geographic focus, and goals. By incorporating immigrants into their grantmaking priorities, they can draw upon myriad strategies for community building and social change that philanthropy has long supported. These strategies include but are not limited to: direct services, capacity building, community outreach and education, leadership development, organizing, advocacy, legal assistance, research, policy analysis, communications, media, and litigation.

Regardless of strategies, foundations should link their investment in immigration integration with efforts to address longstanding community issues such as poverty, education, employment, and neighborhood safety. This approach, which emphasizes shared concerns and positions newcomers as part of the solution, will help increase racial and ethnic equity and enhance community cohesion.

*“The Zellerbach Family Foundation’s commitment to immigrant integration isn’t only based on humanitarian ideals. It is based on a reasoned approach to building strong, inclusive communities. Guided by a board composed of experienced business and community leaders, the Foundation believes that having large numbers of community residents living on the margins can act as a weak link in community-building efforts, and that investing in the integration of low-income immigrants ends up improving the quality of life for all of us.”*

**—Lina Avidan, Program Executive  
Zellerbach Family Foundation  
San Francisco, CA**

# IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS

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## 1. PIONEER IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION POLICIES

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The United States has no national immigrant integration policies, and developing such policies is a long-term goal that merits philanthropic support. In the meantime, a great deal can be done at the state and local levels to facilitate the successful integration of newcomers and encourage their informed and widespread participation in community life.

Foundations are in a unique position to take leadership in initiating and investing in communitywide planning efforts to develop and implement immigrant integration policies. Such efforts are vital to facilitating the integration of newcomers and to strengthening the fabric of our society. Ideally, communitywide planning should be multi-sector, multi-strategy, and multi-ethnic in nature. They should also encompass one or more of the six pathways in GCIR's Immigrant Integration Framework; build on the promising practices featured in this toolkit; and have solid evaluation and dissemination components.

**Philanthropy can—and should—play a pivotal role to shape a vision for a vibrant, cohesive society that is shared and valued by all of its members, regardless of their ethnicity, national origin, or socioeconomic status. This section provides foundations with big-picture recommendations to promote successful immigrant integration in ways that strengthen our broader society. GCIR invites you to review the “Promising Practices in Immigrant Integration” section of this toolkit for specific recommendations on grantmaking strategies for each of the six pathways in our Immigrant Integration Framework.**

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## 2. PROMOTE SELF-SUFFICIENCY

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To help immigrant families achieve self-sufficiency and contribute fully to their communities, foundations can support a wide range of programs including: English classes, education, job training, health care, child care, affordable housing,

financial education, access to credit, legal services, among many others. Effective programs are culturally and linguistically competent, well publicized, and trusted by the community (e.g., immigrants know that using such programs will not have negative immigration consequences for themselves or their family members).

In addition to funding these programs directly, foundations can support research, advocacy, organizing, and communications capacity so that the funding and design of government programs (e.g., safety-net benefits like Medicaid) and systems (e.g., public schools and community colleges) that promote self-sufficiency actually meet the needs of immigrant communities.

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## 3. FACILITATE UPWARD MOBILITY

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Despite their crucial role in the U.S. economy, many immigrants face enormous challenges in achieving economic stability. Foundations can support a number of strategies to address these challenges and create pathways toward upward mobility for immigrant families through funding in the areas of education, employment, financial services, and entrepreneurship.

**Education.** The quality of public education significantly defines the ability of children of immigrants to realize their full potential. Grantmakers can support efforts to increase the availability of early childhood education; improve and expand educational programs for English language learners; increase the involvement of immigrant parents; monitor the impact of No Child Left Behind on immigrant students; provide mentoring, counseling, and other educational supports; expose immigrant students to career and higher-education opportunities; and create pathways to pursue post-secondary education.

**Employment.** Grantmakers can fund programs that help low-skill workers improve English proficiency, increase educational level or vocational skills, and address workplace discrimination and mistreatment. Funders can also support efforts to help immigrants with foreign credentials and work experience secure employment in their professions. In addition, foundations seeking systemic change can invest in living-wage campaigns and other forms of worker organizing, including union organizing, to improve wages, benefits, and working conditions for low-wage workers. Partnerships with worker centers, unions, employers, community colleges, advocacy groups, and others can help increase the impact of these efforts.

**Financial services.** Foundations can increase the availability of affordable financial services to facilitate economic integration. Newcomers can benefit from education on topics such as financial planning, budgeting, and saving for homeownership, college, or other major-ticket expenses. Also important is educating immigrants on predatory lenders and lending practices, as well as services available from banks and other mainstream financial institutions. Services to help working-poor immigrant families apply for the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child Care Tax Credit can help promote economic stability.

**Entrepreneurship.** Foundations can support entrepreneurship opportunities for newcomers, helping them access credit and other resources, conduct market analysis and research, assess financial risks, develop successful business plans, and pool skills and resources. Well-planned small businesses and cooperative enterprises can create a pathway to economic mobility for some immigrants.

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#### 4. ENSURE EQUAL TREATMENT AND OPPORTUNITY

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True opportunity is not possible without equal treatment for all members of society. U.S. laws and policies need to address barriers to integration, such as workplace exploitation, housing discrimination, and restrictions on immigrants' access to resources such as health, social services, banking, and credit. Policies that impede immigrants' ability to integrate also harm the broader society. For example, the exploitation of immigrant workers depresses wages, deteriorates work conditions, and compromises the well-being of all workers. Funders can support community education, legal assistance, organizing, advocacy, litigation, research, and other activities to ensure equal treatment and opportunity for immigrants and other affected groups.

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#### 5. SUPPORT FAIR AND HUMANE IMMIGRATION POLICIES

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An immigration system that embodies the American values of fairness, equality, and opportunity is essential to promoting immigrant integration. Such a system advances U.S. social and economic interests and protects civil rights while enhancing national security. Depending on their priorities, foundations can support efforts to develop and advocate for various changes and improvements in immigration policies including workable legal channels to meet current and future labor-market demands, provisions to protect all workers from exploitation and abuse, a humane and effective immigration enforcement program, expedited processing of family immigration visas, and promotion of naturalization and civic participation.

Given the complexity, scale, and political volatility of the U.S. immigration system, long-term funding for ongoing advocacy and monitoring of policy development and implementation will be needed to ensure that the rights of immigrants—and the broader interests of the community—are protected. Funding for a broad-based, nationally coordinated effort to do so will be crucial. Community education and outreach, legal assistance, documentation, research, and litigation are also important activities to support.

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#### 6. BUILD SOCIAL AND CULTURAL BRIDGES

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Social and cultural interaction is critically important to foster understanding, build trusting relationships, and lay the foundation for mutual engagement. Such interaction often can make or break the integration experience, either erecting roadblocks or paving a path towards integration.

To build social and cultural bridges, funders can support arts and humanities, cultural production and performance, and civic participation activities that emphasize interaction among immigrants and between immigrants and native-born residents. Forums to educate newcomer and receiving communities about one another's cultures, histories, and concerns are also valuable, particularly in newer immigrant destinations unaccustomed to linguistic and cultural differences but also in traditional immigrant strongholds. These activities help newcomer and longtime residents appreciate differences and find common ground.

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## 7. EXPAND IMMIGRANT PARTICIPATION

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The millions of immigrants who participated in rallies, marches, and demonstrations in 2006 clearly illustrate newcomer communities' deep interest in civic life and their commitment to building a future in the United States. Tapping into this groundswell of activism, foundations can support activities such as leadership development, organizing campaigns, naturalization, and non-partisan voter education and registration. Civic education is important to teach newcomers about local institutions and how laws are made; it also gives immigrants the tools they need to participate effectively in local decision-making processes. In funding immigrant participation, funders should pay particular attention to efforts that engage young people and that allow newcomers and established residents, particularly people of color and low-income groups, to work together on issues of common interest.

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## 8. BOLSTER ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

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Local, regional, and national immigrant organizations—and the coalitions and networks that link them together—do a tremendous amount of work with relatively few resources. Capacity-building grants can help these groups strengthen their organizational infrastructure and effectiveness, positioning them to have greater impact to the benefit of both newcomers and the receiving society.

In addition to the standard menu of capacity-building training, from fundraising to board development and financial management, immigrant organizations can be strengthened by training in communications, leadership development, action research, advocacy, and grassroots lobbying permissible by law. Building the capacity of these groups to work across lines of race and ethnicity is crucial, both in traditional immigrant strongholds with significant diversity and in newer gateway communities that are beginning to diversify.

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## 9. STRENGTHEN MULTI-ETHNIC, MULTI-SECTOR ALLIANCES

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Multi-ethnic and multi-sector alliances are vital to successful immigrant integration and effective community building. Philanthropy has long supported efforts that engage both immigrants and native-born, such as organizing and advocacy campaigns to increase access to health care for working families, address educational inequities, and improve wages and working conditions for all workers. Such funding to establish common ground between immigrant and native-born constituencies, regardless of the issues, can improve the well-being for all community members.

Equally important are grants that connect immigrant-based organizations with other strategic partners, such as civil rights groups, labor unions, professional associations, business interests, education systems, health providers, and faith-based organizations. Such grants can support coalition building and the development of partnerships and alliances, regular convenings, strategy sessions, and other activities that connect immigrant groups to broader efforts to improve opportunities for all members of society.

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## 10. ENHANCE COMMUNICATIONS CAPACITY

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Funding of communications activities is pivotal to creating openness to immigrant integration and policy reform measures that expand, instead of restrict, opportunities for newcomers and other communities that have mutual interests. Activities such as message development, framing, public-opinion research, and ethnic and mainstream media outreach can educate immigrants

about their rights and responsibilities, increase public understanding of the experiences of newcomers and their contributions to society, and inform debates on policy issues that can affect the well-being of immigrant families. Communications training for immigrant leaders and allies is also important to increase their effectiveness in the media and other public arenas. In addition, multi-lingual polling can ensure that immigrants' voices are heard in mainstream debates.

Given the volatility of immigration issues, funders can support the development of "rapid response" capacity to help immigrant groups get their viewpoints out to

**At this historic crossroads, philanthropy can play a critical role in promoting the full integration of newcomers into our society. Philanthropic investment and leadership—combined with the vision and hard work of immigrant and allied organizations—will help ensure that America lives up to its heritage as the land of freedom and opportunity. The future vibrancy of our country is at stake.**

the media and the general public in a timely manner. Those wishing to make a large investment can support paid campaigns in both print and electronic media. Communications efforts should take place at various levels, from the grassroots to inside the Beltway. Depending on their resources and desired level of impact, local and national funders have a range of options for investing in communications strategies.

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