

CIVIC PARTICIPATION AND IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY AND THE DEMOCRACY

OF NECKTIES, NOT BASEBALL BATS

Gloria and Adon, Mexican-American leaders and board members of the Idaho Community Action Network (ICAN), sought the meeting with the administrator of the State's Department of Health and Welfare (DHW) to discuss how the Department was planning to notify the immigrant community of recent state and federal changes in benefit systems. The leaders were well-informed about changes in Food Stamp eligibility, and they brought constructive suggestions for simplifying applications and doing outreach to immigrants. "We hope you look at us as partners," said Adon, "not someone coming with a baseball bat." The administrator welcomed the partnership.

In contrast, ICAN's earlier four-year struggle to pass Idaho's minimum-wage law for farmworkers, though eventually successful, was not always as amicable. But it laid the foundation for a working relationship with DHW that made the negotiations on Food Stamps possible. It also contributed to the self-education of hundreds of immigrants who had participated in the campaign—and produced positive community change for thousands more.

Adon and Gloria have devoted countless volunteer hours promoting immigrant civic participation of this sort.

"Immigrants have experienced the problems," explains Adon, and in helping to solve them "they are participating in self-improvement. To make change, one thing you have to learn is how the system works and how the other person—the guy in the necktie—thinks."

"Immigrants need to speak for themselves," says Gloria. "Another culture adds to the United States, it doesn't take anything away. We need to learn one another's cultures."

Such participation in civic life—identifying and solving problems together, educating one another, developing relationships with people from unlike backgrounds, including government officials—is part of the process of immigrants integrating into their new country. Some would argue it is the process of integration, drawing newcomers into active engagement in their communities and the democracy.

LEARNING HOW INSTITUTIONS AND GOVERNMENT WORK

Experience is our best teacher, and civic participation is experiential education for immigrants and refugees in their new country. Drawn by a common desire to improve conditions for their families and communities, newcomers engage with community institutions and, in so doing, learn how government and civic processes work and ways to influence them.

For example, immigrants who participated in Florida's successful 2004 campaign to raise the minimum wage, sponsored by the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), learned how the initiative process works in the state. Newcomers who were part of the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform¹ learned how to improve inner-city schools. Among refugees, members of People Acting in Community Together in Stockton, California, worked with the local police to address rising

1. Members include the Alliance Organizing Project in Philadelphia, New York ACORN, Oakland Community Organizations in California's Bay Area, Austin Interfaith in Texas, and Chicago's Logan Square Neighborhood Association. See the "Promising Practices in Education" section for details on Logan Square's work.



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violence among their youth; as a result, the force hired Hmong liaisons to help them better serve the community.

When immigrant women in Arlandia, Virginia, realized that they shared a concern about the lack of children's recreational space in their working-class neighborhood, their membership in the Women's Leadership Group of the Tenants' and Workers' Support Committee helped them to advocate effectively with the Alexandria Parks and Recreation Department. They started by mapping the number of parks in Arlandia and its surrounding middle-class neighborhoods, documenting the dramatic differences in facilities. Then they researched the Parks and Recreation budget, uncovering unused funds that had been set aside for tennis courts. Their research, advocacy, and relationship with Parks and Recreation led to more than \$100,000 in new recreational facilities in Arlandia.

STORIES OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Each of these examples of newcomer civic engagement is a story of human development. Skills and knowledge building—as well as attitude and behavior change—are vitally important components of immigrant integration.

Change can be dramatic for newcomers as they develop into civic leaders. Fadumo, who with her husband and 11 children fled the civil war in Somalia, eventually settled in Minneapolis. Although she found working with immigrant elders and families rewarding, it was civic participation that made the greatest difference in her life. With the assistance of VOICE for Community Power and the Organizing Apprenticeship Project, Fadumo led a voter participation campaign in the Somali refugee community during the 2002 Senatorial elections. When the candidates met with the Somali community, incumbent Senator Paul Wellstone was introduced by Fadumo. "Before I was shy and scared," she says, "but this helped me to build my own voice. I can go everywhere now. We Somali women are hungry to bring Somali power to the community."



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A similar transformation took place for Margarita and other mothers with children in the public schools of unincorporated Lost Hills, California. Ninety-seven percent of the population in this rural community in Kern County is working-poor Latinos, and 88 percent of the children qualify for the free-lunch program. An unresponsive school board motivated civic participation by Margarita and her neighbors. "They said it was not for us to come with concerns to the school," says Margarita. "But that is exactly what we should be doing." The mothers began their effort by collecting signatures to change the scheduled time for school board meetings from 12 noon when most parents are at work to 6 PM when more parents can attend.

With the help of Valley Catholic Charities, these immigrant parents continued their involvement in the school system. Later efforts led to a Grand Jury investigation that contributed to the early retirement of the school superintendent, and also ensured parental input on the search for a new superintendent. After two school board members were discovered to live illegally outside the district, three Latina mothers were elected to serve on the Board.



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STORIES OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

"To build relationships, you want to focus on what's common, get people working to improve quality-of-life issues they share."

—Karen Bass, Founding Executive Director, Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment

By working collectively to solve problems and improve community conditions, immigrants and refugees also develop strong relationships across lines of class, race, and ethnicity among those with whom they work. Adons of Idaho and the DHW "guys in the neckties"—and the moms from Arlandia and the Parks and Recreation administrators—illustrate the importance of such relationships.

The best civic participation organizations attend carefully and strategically to the process of bringing people from different backgrounds into relationship with one another. For example, when Florida ACORN wanted to encourage

Haitian, Honduran, and Jamaican immigrants to work with the native-born, they held a barbecue. First, the children began playing with one another; then the parents began to mix. Joint civic participation followed, resulting in the registration of 15,000 people for the 2000 election. In Washington, DC, the Tellin' Stories Project brings immigrant and African-American parents together at local schools, getting them to share stories through making books and stitching quilts. Relationships develop in the school setting, as does comfort; guided by the Project, the parents became increasingly involved in school participation.



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Karen Bass, founding executive director of the Community Coalition in South Los Angeles and now a California Assembly Member for the 47th District, sees civic participation as the best way to build intergroup relationships. While many traditional intergroup programs get people talking about what makes them different, Bass takes a different tact. "To build relationships," she says, "you want to focus on what's common, get people working to improve quality-of-life issues they share."

For example, the Gamaliel Foundation brought newly arrived Latino immigrants and African-Americans together in Milwaukee around the issue of housing. The Pacific Institute for Community Organization, in its California Project, identified health care as a common concern shared by middle-class whites and newcomers. And the issue of human rights brought immigrants and members of the LGBT community into common cause through CAUSA, Oregon's statewide immigrant rights coalition.

The first quality-of-life issue that Bass' Community Coalition tackled was closing down "nuisance" liquor stores and motels. In working for this goal, the extraordinary diversity of the Coalition's neighborhood presented a challenge, bringing some community members together while separating others.

The divide was not only between newcomers and African-Americans. The newcomers—black and Latino immigrants from the Caribbean, Central America, and Mexico—held different viewpoints about their identities and experiences. For example, Latinos and black Caribbeans don't necessarily self-identify along their shared experience as immigrants. Similarly, African-Americans and Caribbeans don't necessarily share identity as blacks. Negative stereotypes about one another also widened the divide. Some blacks felt the Korean store owners were heartless; some Latinos felt Pakistani motel owners were exploitive.

The strategy that the Coalition brings to bear on such potential divisiveness is education, possibly the most important component of any civic participation program. Coalition members study the history of their changing neighborhood, learning of the systemic economic and social forces that can lead newcomer merchants, many of whom also live on the economic margins, to rent rooms by the hour, underpay their workforce, or emphasize the sale of liquor. To successfully work together, says Bass, people need to be informed about the systemic forces at work, "to learn the facts about race, racism, and demographics." Such learning is a key dimension as newcomers and the native-born develop relationships through civic participation.

THE ORGANIZATIONS THAT MAKE IT POSSIBLE

Many institutions have been mentioned here that draw newcomers into civic life. Thousands exist across the country, and their numbers are growing with the newcomer population. They include congregation- and neighborhood-based networks, worker centers, hometown associations, locally based groups, ethnic-specific volunteer efforts, new labor initiatives, youth organizing institutions, voter registration and participation projects, and more. The best of them approach integration with similar principles. Mentioned in the introduction to this section, these principles bear repeating:

- Newcomers are encouraged to take responsibility and engage in all aspects of community problem-solving.
- Programs start where the newcomers start, involving them with issues that affect their daily lives and leading them toward deeper analyses and more effective strategies to address these issues.
- Newcomer learning and growth—learning by doing—is at the heart of all program design.
- Building relationships with people from unlike backgrounds is an important goal.

Several regional organizations are helping traditional immigrant service-delivery groups learn such strategies. All of these institutions have built deep relationships with scores of local organizations, providing training programs, tested curricular materials, and train-the-trainer approaches.

A particularly promising coalition of five such organizations—the Collaborative for Immigrant Empowerment Leadership and Organizing (CIELO)—has begun to emerge as a potential national network. CIELO's membership includes the Western States Center in the Northwest; Partnership for Immigrant Leadership and Action in California; the Coalition of African, Asian, European, and Latino Immigrants of Illinois; the Center to Support Immigrant Organizing in Boston; and Highlander Research and Education Center, which works throughout the Southeast. Together, these groups have a network of at least 150 organizations working with diverse newcomer communities in 24 states.

As the CIELO collaboration continues to develop, its member organizations are deepening their practice regionally, bringing civic participation strategies to their locally networked groups. They are helping other institutions with long histories of promoting civic participation incorporate newcomers in non-traditional gateway states. All of the groups are critical players in the active engagement of immigrants and refugees in community and civic life, itself a critical strategy of newcomer integration.



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DVD

**Watch the DVD
Grassroots Rising:
Workplace Improvement**

More than 140 worker centers across the country are helping to improve wages and working conditions for immigrant and other low-wage workers. Learn about this burgeoning movement and how it is empowering newcomers to stand up for their rights, join forces with native-born workers, and speak with one voice.

CIVIC PARTICIPATION AND NEW LABOR ORGANIZING

As unions turn their attention to organizing the growing number of immigrants in America, they are sponsoring and supporting numerous civic participation projects, often in partnership with community organizations.

The AFL-CIO's decision to reverse its position on immigration in 2000 laid the groundwork for strong union support of immigrant rights, including the historic Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride of 2003. Twenty buses from ten cities carried 1,000 riders across the country to join with thousands of union, community, and faith-based leaders in New York and other cities to promote a platform of immigrant rights and citizenship. The Freedom Ride was a milestone in the commitment of organized labor to fight for the rights of immigrants.

Many unions—including those in the AFL-CIO and ones in the newly formed Change to Win federation²—are organizing in sectors of the economy with a strong immigrant presence. They are supporting leadership development, ESL, voter engagement, and other programs to advance immigrant rights. As the national debate over immigration policy heats up, these unions are mobilizing

“Organized labor is playing a vital role in supporting low-wage immigrant workers and their families to achieve basic human rights and a decent standard of living. Whether through workplace organizing campaigns—or in collaboration with community and faith-based organizations working on immigrant rights, affordable housing, health care, or child care, among others—unions are mobilizing their members and resources to achieve greater social and economic justice for immigrants. Philanthropic investment in these efforts can help advance the integration of low-wage immigrant workers into our society.”

—Henry Allen, Executive Director
Discount Foundation
Boston, Massachusetts

their members and lobbying intensively for legislation that includes a clear path toward legalization and citizenship for millions of immigrant workers.

Increasingly, at the local level, unions recognize that community support for organizing drives among immigrants is crucial to their success—and that union involvement in issues of vital concern to immigrant communities (e.g., health care, education, affordable housing, access to drivers' licenses) is key to building strong partnerships. Organizing drives among janitors, hotel and industrial laundry workers, and poultry and meat-processing workers offer recent examples of such collaboration.

Foundations have supported, and continue to support, labor-community collaborations by funding independent research into the conditions of work in industries notorious for exploiting immigrant workers and by supporting community and faith-based efforts to expose and correct these abuses.

- Organizing in the South—the region with the highest percentage increase of newly arrived immigrants and the weakest union presence—is increasingly drawing the attention of the labor movement, national community-organizing networks, and foundations.

- Unions have been actively establishing and/or supporting worker centers such as the Voice and Future Fund created by SEIU Local 615 in Boston, (the Justice for Janitors local). Immigrant members of this union have the opportunity to improve their English, hone computer skills, develop leadership skills, and forge new relationships with other community-based organizations.

- In New York City, a collaboration among SEIU Local 32BJ, Make the Road By Walking, AFSCME DC 37, HERE Local 100, and the National Employment Law Project has created the New York Civic Participation Project. This effort organizes immigrant union members around issues important to their families in

2. This new federation includes the Service Employees International Union, United Food and Commercial Workers, UNITE/HERE, Teamster, Carpenters, Laborers, and Farmworkers.

their home neighborhoods of Washington Heights, Bushwick, the South Bronx, and Queens.

- In Miami, Unite for Dignity, an independent non-profit affiliated with SEIU Local 1199, offers leadership classes to low-wage immigrant workers.
- In Oregon, the union of tree planters and farmworkers, Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN), promotes voter education, youth leadership, housing development, micro-enterprise among women, and immigrant rights.
- The Front Range Economic Strategy Center (FRESC) has become the hub for accountable development policy campaigns serving low-income communities in metro Denver. It is an alliance of over fifty community, labor, inter-faith, immigrant, and environmental groups. In 2004-2005, it expanded its voter education and outreach activities in immigrant communities and launched the Civic Leadership Institute, with a focus on immigrant rights issues and opposing Proposition 200, an anti-immigrant state ballot initiative.

These efforts and others like them across the country are increasingly drawing support from foundations seeking to promote civic participation and effect policy change.

Although unions are not as powerful as they once were, they still bring to the table the voices of 14 million workers, including more and more newcomers. They also have national infrastructure, financial resources, political clout on policy issues, seasoned organizers and research staff, and the ability to effect change on a national scale.

Foundations seeking to leverage the impact of their grants can support non-profit organizations directly affiliated with unions and community organizations with strong ties to labor. With the exercise of expenditure responsibility they can make grants directly to unions themselves.



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YOUTH ACTIVISM

INFUSING NEW ENERGY INTO IMMIGRANT ORGANIZING

The student population at Horlick High School in Racine closely mirrors the ethnic breakdown of this small Wisconsin city. Fifty-six percent of the students are Caucasian, 24 percent African-American, 18 percent Latino, and two percent Asian.

The Latino population at the school, like that of the community, comprises both American-born Chicanos and foreign-born Latinos. Tensions between these two groups are a fixture in communities across the country, and Racine is no exception. At Horlick, however, the formation of a student group, Students United for Immigrant Rights (SUIR), has begun to break down these long-held animosities.

Prior to the formation of SUIR, many of the immigrant students at Horlick believed the Chicano students were ashamed of their heritage because they spoke little or no Spanish and often seemed culturally more American than Latino. For their part, the Chicanos probably felt stung by suggestions that they were no longer 'true' Latinos. The two groups seldom communicated. Sometimes, the simmering tensions

"Giving students opportunities to organize and become active around the issue of immigrant rights has helped change the culture of our school and created and strengthened bonds among students, families, the school, and the community."

**—Ryan Knudson and Al Levie,
Teachers, Horlick High School,
Racine, Wisconsin**

erupted in school-yard fights. But this dynamic has improved since the formation of SUIR.

"We have seen a dramatic reduction in the Latino suspension rate," said Nola Starling-Ratliff, Horlick directing principal. "[The students' activism] has broken down divisions among students and elevated the level of thinking."

The lead-up to the creation of SUIR is a story of students discovering and exercising their civic rights. It is also the story of a schism between two groups, the immigrants and the Chicanos, being bridged. It begins in 2003 in a Latino-American history course at Horlick.

After watching the PBS series *Matters of Race*, which includes a segment about the increase in Mexican immigrant workers in a small town in the South, Al Levie's Latin-American history class discussed racism and the immigrant experience in America. Spurred by the talk, students who were going to a local rally organized by Voces de la Frontera, a community organizing group working in both Milwaukee and Racine, invited their history teacher to accompany them. News coverage of the rally provoked a spat of anti-immigrant letters that were published in the local newspaper. In response, the students wrote group and individual rebuttals in class which were also published in the paper, engaging the community in a discussion of immigrant issues.

Around this time, Christine Neumann-Ortiz, director of Voces de la Frontera, contacted Levie, the history teacher, to let him know that Representative Pedro Colón of Milwaukee had introduced a bill in the Wisconsin Assembly that would



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allow undocumented immigrant students to attend state institutions of higher education at resident tuition rates. Levie invited representatives from Voces to directly address the mostly Chicano Latino-American history class about the issue and the legislation. Another teacher in the school, Ryan Knudson, brought his ESL class—mostly immigrants—to the discussion as well. Prompted by the discussion, the students arranged for a field trip to Madison, the state's capital, to attend a hearing on the bill. They prepared testimony on the bill, including a statement from an undocumented student at Horlick about her situation.

Shortly after the students gave testimony at the state capitol, Voces invited seven of the students and one of their sponsors to go to Washington, D.C. to advocate for the DREAM Act. Students received training from the Center for Community Change and spent a day lobbying elected officials.

Upon their return from Washington, the students organized a large Cinco de Mayo party—partly as a fundraiser to help pay the expenses for the trip. Hundreds of Latino students (both immigrants and Chicanos), their family members, community members, and school officials came together for the first time. Students spoke to the gathering about their participation in the political process.

Publicity about the student participation in Madison and Washington and about the Cinco de Mayo celebration sparked criticism from a group of community members at the next Racine Board of Education meeting. The group demanded the Board dismiss Levie, the history teacher who had sponsored the field trips.

In response, Voces called a meeting of the parents of students who had participated, and at the next meeting those parents and students—Chicano and immigrant—made a presentation thanking the Board for giving their children the opportunity to participate in the field trips and to learn first-hand about the democratic process. This saved Levie from dismissal and generated even greater interest among other students at the school. It was then that SUIR was formed.

“It has made Latino kids feel like they have a voice,” said Mark Zanin, the sub-school principal. “The impact of [SUIR] and the issues they’ve taken on has demonstrated to them, and to the community, that they do have a voice, and that people will listen to them.”

Since its formation, SUIR has worked to bring together students and community in pushing for social change. In the fall of 2004, in one of its first major efforts, SUIR joined with Voces and the NAACP to plan a nonpartisan election-day get-out-the-vote campaign. One aspect involved specially trained Horlick students doing door-to-door campaigning. The school approved the event and promised to waive the absences of those students who wished to participate.

However, a few days before the election, community members associated with an anti-immigrant website asserted that the mobilization drive, aimed in particular at low-income neighborhoods in Racine with a concentration of African-Americans and Latinos, was partisan in nature and that it was inappropriate for the school to allow such activities. On the Monday before the elections, the school administration withdrew its support of the event and announced that students who did not attend classes on Tuesday would be disciplined.

Despite the reversal, over 250 Horlick students chose to face the school’s penalties—and the rain and cold weather—in order to encourage others to vote. Students—from freshmen to seniors—chose to walk neighborhoods for the drive, according to the local newspaper.

“I feel really disappointed in the school district for withdrawing their support in our effort to get people to vote,” said 16-year-old Xavier Marques, first president of SUIR, in comments to the paper. “For them to fold just because of a little bit of pressure from an outside group is wrong. From the beginning we have been nonpartisan. We are just focused on getting out the vote.”

In 2005, there was a referendum in the Racine school district to add a small amount to property tax for the school to



be able to maintain athletic and arts program and to keep the full school maintenance staff employed. With low voter turnout in low-income precincts, the property tax measure failed, and the district was forced to implement cuts in programs.

When students realized what happened, they were outraged. Students from several schools in the district, with Horlick students playing a key role, formed a diverse coalition that called itself Save Our Schools. This student-led coalition turned out a 1,500-person protest for a school board hearing, winning a new vote on the referendum.

For the second referendum, SUIR was in charge of the GOTV effort for the City of Racine—the same kind of effort as for the 2004 election. Other student groups worked in the suburban areas. Altogether, there was a 10 percent increase in voter turnout for the second election, and this time the property tax increase passed. Christine Neumann-Ortiz of Voces de la Frontera says, “The students were leading the adults—and most of them can’t vote, but they were able to take the initiative for change.”

Students like Xavier have become activists in response to the racism and the unfairness they see that immigrants face. At Horlick, confronting these issues together has allowed students to reach out to each other across the schism that exists so often between American-born Chicanos and newcomer Latinos. Friendships have formed across a previously impassable divide, and there is increasing collaboration between students in the two factions.

“Giving students opportunities to organize and become active around the issue of immigrant rights has helped change the culture of our school and created and strengthened bonds among students, families, the school, and the community,” wrote Ryan Knudson and Al Levie, the school sponsors of SUIR, in an article published last fall. “It has also helped students from marginalized groups become actively engaged, academically successful, and to rise to positions of leadership in the school and the community.”



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BUILDING A MOVEMENT THROUGH ELECTORAL ORGANIZING

MOBILIZE THE IMMIGRANT VOTE

www.immigrantvoice.org

DVD

Watch the DVD

The New Los Angeles: Voting

Participation in the electoral process is an ultimate marker of immigrant integration. See how Latino and African-American labor, faith, and community leaders in Los Angeles launched an unprecedented grassroots get-out-the-vote campaign. Their citywide, multi-ethnic coalition helped elect a Latino mayor focused on the entire city "growing and prospering together."

The statewide Mobilize the Immigrant Vote (MIV) campaign in California focused on bringing a growing but underrepresented segment of the population more fully into the political process. Although increasing voter turnout among immigrants was a prime goal of the effort, MIV's election work was conceptualized as part of a larger and ongoing movement for social change. A cornerstone of the MIV approach is building capacity of existing organizations to participate effectively in both the short- and long-term goals of the campaign.

The MIV campaign was led by Partnership for Immigrant Leadership and Action (PILA) in collaboration with Bay Area Immigrant Rights Coalition (BAIRC); California Partnership (CAP); Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA); National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (NNIRR); and Services, Immigrant Rights, and Education Network (SIREN). The first of its kind in California, this statewide collaboration was funded by Akonadi Foundation, Four Freedoms Fund, James Irvine Foundation, Liberty Hill Foundation, and The San Francisco Foundation.

MIV views community-based organizations (CBOs) as a critical infrastructure for catalyzing and sustaining civic and political participation in local communities. Their ongoing presence and relationships in the community position them to educate and mobilize their

constituents for elections. However, many lack the skills, tools, and support to do so effectively.

In the 2004 campaign, MIV linked 112 diverse, immigrant-focused CBOs across the state in an electoral organizing effort, mobilizing well over 1,200 volunteers. Not only had many of these CBOs never engaged in elections work before, but nearly a third reported that they would not have done any elections work without MIV support. MIV provided them

"The training that I took with PILA, as part of the MIV effort, was very interesting. I learned a lot and it was a great opportunity to get to know other organizations and see how we can work together."

—Maria Carrillo, member
Mujeres Unidas y Activas

with voter education materials in a number of languages, workshops in electoral basics and issue analysis, media advocacy training, and ongoing technical assistance.

In their work with CBOs, MIV encouraged a movement-building approach to elections as a way to both increase the voices of immigrants in the 2004 elections and build capacity in immigrant communities for effecting long-term change. The emphasis was on employing strategies that would lead to both of these outcomes.



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The differences between a traditional electoral campaign and a movement-building campaign are illustrated through four contrasts:

1. Instead of ending a campaign after the election, the movement-building approach makes elections a part of a long-term strategy for making change in communities. This includes ongoing civic participation and organizing efforts between elections.

2. Instead of viewing the campaign as won or lost depending on election results, a movement-building strategy understands that the electoral work builds relationships and energizes communities regardless of election outcomes.

3. Instead of focusing on likely voters, the movement-building approach views voting as one of many ways to shift power and make change, and it understands that there is a place in electoral work for everyone, whether they are eligible to vote or not.

4. Instead of focusing solely on the number of contacts made in the campaign, the movement-building approach also looks to strengthen organizations and communities by increasing visibility, forging new alliances, developing a stronger base of community leaders and volunteers, and linking election issues to ongoing organizing.

Movement-building is a systemic approach that creates opportunities for fuller engagement and builds lasting capacity in communities. For example, the MIV collaborative did not develop a platform for the campaign but led a



© IPLA, MIV, Philippine Bayan Rescue Center

community-based process that engaged partner organizations and immigrant community members in discussing issues on the November 2004 ballot. These issue forums encouraged direct community participation, providing a model of a process that both educates voters and builds community capacity to analyze policy issues. In this “bottom-up” approach, these discussions directly informed the development of the voter guide that was distributed to over 21,000 community members. A number of participating organizations replicated the discussion forums in their own communities, building the capacity of those constituencies to debate and determine policy positions on their own.

To facilitate the participation of limited English proficient immigrants, MIV provided translation services in a number of languages at the public forums and training sessions. The campaign also developed and disseminated crucial multilingual voter education materials designed to be specifically relevant to low-income immigrant communities. These voter information materials reached tens of thousands of immigrant voters

in California and eliminated the need for individual community organizations to develop their own.

The MIV collaborative was committed to evaluating its work and to disseminating lessons learned from the campaign. From the earliest planning stages of the campaign, a framework for collecting and assessing information was developed, activities were documented, and a post-election evaluation was conducted. A detailed report, *Democracy at Stake? A Report on Outcomes and Lessons from the Mobilize the Immigrant Vote 2004 California Campaign* was published in 2005. In addition, the MIV collaborative now has sample work plans and extensive tools that have proven useful and have documented lessons on which to build in the future.

The impact of MIV went well beyond engaging immigrants in the 2004 elections. MIV laid the groundwork for a multi-ethnic, statewide movement through building relationships and trust among grassroots organizations. Fifty-nine percent of organizations that participated in the campaign were collaborating with other organizations they had never worked with before to carry out electoral activities, and 95 percent affirmed that they want to be part of future MIV campaigns. MIV plans to continue to strengthen the capacity of this network to raise immigrant voices in the electoral process and beyond.



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SUPPORTING THE CITIZENSHIP PROCESS

Naturalization is one of the ultimate markers of immigrant integration. In a 2003 national survey, two out of three immigrants indicated that “show[ing] a commitment and pride in being an American” is a major reason to naturalize.³ Reflecting this commitment to become full members of society, increasing numbers of immigrants became citizens in the 1990s. As of 2004, 35 percent, or about 12.4 million, of the total foreign-born population in the United States were naturalized citizens.⁴

Today, at least another eight million immigrants are eligible for citizenship.⁵ Low levels of English proficiency, formal education, and income level characterize a significant share of this population. For example, an estimated 60 percent are limited English proficient. Lack of information about citizenship presents another hurdle to naturalization. A 2005 study commissioned by the Illinois Coalition of Immigrant and Refugee Rights found that most immigrants find out about naturalization through an acquaintance or on their own initiative.⁶ Eighty percent did not know the application cost, currently \$320 and soon to rise.

Immigrants will face additional barriers to naturalization, including higher fees. But the redesign of the citizenship test presents a more worrisome obstacle. The new test, to be launched in 2007 possibly in a format similar to the SAT, would put those with limited English at a greater disadvantage than the current conversation-based examination.

Foundations wishing to address current and future barriers and promote naturalization among eligible immigrants can support programs that incorporate the following promising practices:

“The way I look at it is I want to become a citizen to vote because I wanted to make a difference. It’s as simple as that.”

—A Jordanian immigrant living in Virginia



© Mark Harmel / Alamy

- **Active outreach to educate newcomers about the naturalization process.** Citizenship fairs, promotion through the ethnic media, and outreach to service providers are some of the best ways to inform immigrants.

- **High-quality, multi-media English language instruction materials to increase citizenship candidates’ understanding of the history and government of the United States.** Such instruction is already an essential part of preparing immigrants to naturalize, but it will become even more important once changes to the citizenship test are instituted.

- **Bilingual English tutors, including those who are recently naturalized.** Having peer tutors, especially ones with a first-hand understanding of the naturalization process, can enhance the learning and improve outcomes.

- **Conveniently scheduled classes and programs for working immigrants.** Citizenship classes, English courses, and outreach events offered in the evenings, on weekends, and in the workplace, ideally in partnership with employers, are much more accessible to newcomers, many of whom work long hours and multiple jobs.

- **Legal consultation for citizenship applicants.** Application-assistance programs must have legal expertise to help prospective applicants identify “red flags” in their backgrounds that could put them at risk by entering the naturalization process. A minor criminal conviction in the distant past, for example, can place an immigrant in deportation proceedings. Therefore, funders should support only programs that give every application careful legal review.

- **Engagement of naturalizing immigrants in community problem solving and civic life.** The immigrant integration

framework envisions citizenship as a fully active endeavor. Civic participation during the naturalization process not only helps prepare students for the exam, but it also encourages active civic involvement to which all citizens, native-born or naturalized, should aspire.

- **Integrated voter education, registration, and participation.** Naturalization programs with this component can improve the citizenship preparation process by helping naturalizing immigrants understand their responsibilities as U.S. citizens.

“I became a citizen because this is my country; I have no other. I’m going to live here. My kids are going to live here. With all of us, we can make it a great country.”

—A Salvadoran immigrant living in Los Angeles

- **Advocacy, organizing, and research to ensure that the new citizenship examination strengthens the process, the immigrant, and the community.** Funders can support a range of local and national efforts, such as an independent task force, to monitor policy development and implementation and to facilitate communication between citizenship stakeholders and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, the bureau within the Department of Homeland Security that succeeded the INS. Foundations can also support research on denials of citizenship and on the experience of particularly vulnerable subgroups under a new examination regime.

3. This new federation includes the Service Employees International Union, United Food and Commercial Workers, UNITE/HERE, Teamsters, Carpenters, Laborers, and Farmworkers.

4. Passel, Jeffery S. 2005. *Unauthorized Migrants: Numbers and Characteristics*. Washington, D.C.: Pew Hispanic Center. June.

5. Ibid.

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EVALUATING CIVIC PARTICIPATION EFFORTS

Civic participation among immigrants can take many forms, from improving a neighborhood park, a civic activity in which non-naturalized citizens can participate, to voting and running for office, once they are naturalized. Participation in communitywide planning processes for social change is also an important form of civic participation (see section on communitywide planning).

To promote these forms of participation, foundations can support initiatives and institutions that help immigrants develop the ability to influence decisions that affect their lives, understand how systems are organized in the United States, enhance the skills to express their concerns to decision makers and others, and gain access to an infrastructure that will provide them with the necessary support for becoming civically engaged.

These initiatives will result in outputs which, in turn, can lead to activities such as voting, collective action to improve their communities, and serving on governing or advisory boards. In the process of doing so, immigrants consciously become stronger leaders, capable of bringing about more change by mobilizing other people to do the same. Civic institutions in the receiving community will also be transformed in the process, becoming more inclusive and democratic.

Foundations can determine if outcomes occurred by collecting information such as the following:

- Amount of time spent attending meetings or volunteering in activities and/or money contributed to various types of civic and community organizations, such as cultural and linguistic associations, religious institutions, and hometown associations.
- Number of contacts with local and federal officials on a community or national concern.
- Percentage of immigrants who participate in the following civic acts and the frequency of these acts:
 - Attending community meetings to discuss and solve community problems.
 - Organizing groups, ideally working both with other newcomers and established residents, to solve community problems.
 - Voting in local, state, and national elections.
 - Participating in non-partisan voter registration drives.
 - Persuading others to register to vote (e.g., nonpartisan voter registration drives).
 - Organizing nonpartisan candidate forums.

On the part of the receiving community, foundations can observe changes made by civic organizations and government entities in the following areas:

- Change in meeting times and locations to make it easier for immigrants to participate.
- Improved knowledge about incentives and barriers to immigrant participation.
- Allocation of time to listening to each person's views and for individual and collective reflection.
- Active outreach to and inclusion of newcomers in their work, e.g., diversifying their boards, staff, and volunteers, providing interpretation at meetings.
- Creation of additional opportunities for newcomers to participate in community problem solving.

EVALUATING CIVIC PARTICIPATION EFFORTS

OUTPUTS

- Belief that one can make a difference.
- Understand benefits of participation.
- Stronger communication and interpersonal skills (e.g., active listening, public speaking).
- More informed about U.S. systems and what is happening in the community, state, and nation.
- Infrastructure for civic participation (e.g., establishment of forums, training, and support).



These outputs encourage civic participation, and as participation increases, these outputs will also become more widespread.



OUTCOMES

For all immigrants, regardless of immigration status:

- Community voluntarism.
- Participation in collective action and advocacy efforts.
- Contact with elected representatives at all levels of government.
- Broader and more diverse relationships.
- Stronger civic and political leadership.
- Serve on governing or advisory bodies.

For naturalized immigrants:

- Voter participation in local, state, and national elections.
- Running for elected positions.

For receiving community:

- Stronger, more diverse leaders.
- More inclusive and democratic institutions.



These outcomes encourage integration, and as integration gradually occurs, these outcomes will also become more widespread.



IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION

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