

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 broad community planning endeavors ↔ Systematically engage newcomers in community planning efforts

Language & Education

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

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

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

Health, Well-being, & Economic Mobility

Programs that promote health, 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, paying taxes, and starting new businesses ↔ Offer access to training opportunities, living-wage jobs, and support for entrepreneurship

Equal Treatment & Opportunity

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

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

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 to find common ground ↔ Engage with newcomers 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 processes, engage in life of broader community ↔ Promote citizenship, opportunities for 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.