



# All Immigration Is Local

## Receiving Communities and Their Role in Successful Immigrant Integration

Michael Jones-Correa September 2011

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# Foreword

In the spring of 2006, the organization I helped found—the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition, or TIRRC—embarked on a new experiment that differed from traditional programming focusing on integrating immigrants into American life. We dedicated a substantial amount of our time and resources to engaging Tennessee’s “immigrant-receiving communities,” the long-time residents of towns or cities that had recently experienced an influx of immigrants and/or refugees.

Tennessee saw one of the fastest rates of immigrant population growth of any state between 1990 and 2005. These population shifts were due in large part to a construction boom in Tennessee’s largest cities that attracted large numbers of immigrants from Latin America. These newcomers were joined by a significant influx of refugees, primarily Kurds (from Northern Iraq), Somalis, and Sudanese. These demographic changes raised anxiety among a native-born population that was unaccustomed to hearing foreign languages or to seeing immigrants in their daily lives.

TIRRC launched the Welcoming Tennessee Initiative, or WTI, to address these rising tensions. WTI is designed to stop the alarmingly rapid negative slide in public opinion toward local immigrants. We realized that as long as the local climate remained hostile, local immigrants—feeling unwelcome and in many cases afraid—would be less likely to integrate into the mainstream society.

Almost immediately, Welcoming Tennessee began to ease community concerns and misperceptions by bringing recent immigrants and long-time Tennessee residents into direct contact, often for the first time. This contact took many forms, including community dialogues, presentations by local immigrants, or international potluck dinners. The initiative also focused on elevating the positive contributions immigrants were bringing to Tennessee. TIRRC used everything from billboards on Tennessee highways, to letters to the editor in local papers, to church bulletin advertisements.

Over time, Welcoming Tennessee gained a positive reputation across the country and the initiative began to spread to other states. Since 2008, campaigns across the country have been organized under the Welcoming America banner, an organization I became executive director of in 2009, with the explicit goal of placing more emphasis on addressing the anxieties of receiving communities.

After spending more than five years spreading the receiving communities gospel, I have learned there are hundreds of organizations and thousands of individuals who focus much of their immigrant integration efforts on engaging immigrant-receiving communities. These individuals and groups have come to the realization, as we did in 2006, that immigrant integration can only be truly successful when receiving communities, in addition to immigrants, are supported and engaged during the integration process. After all, can a plant succeed in a garden if the soil is barren and unaccommodating?

What is also clear is that groups focused on receiving communities operate largely in isolation. In other words, there is a receiving communities field but not a receiving communities movement. As a result, initiatives often reinvent the wheel and they repeat mistakes already made by others in different areas of the country.

It was out of a desire to weave the dispersed receiving communities field into a movement, to attract new ideas and research from academia, and to raise awareness among potential supporters of the paradigm-shifting receiving communities concept, that the Receiving Communities Initiative came together. It is a product of my organization, Welcoming America, along with the J.M. Kaplan Fund and the Center for American Progress.

After months of planning, the Receiving Communities Initiative conference took place at the Center for American Progress in December 2010. The two-day gathering pulled together scholars and practitioners from across the United States and Canada with the knowledge and experience to diagnose and treat the causes of immigration anxiety in receiving communities.

In the report that follows, RCI participant Professor Michael Jones-Correa of Cornell University makes the case for a multisector focus on immigrant-receiving communities, and presents several of the recommended strategies of conference participants. The report yields important insights for key actors on the local and national levels such as nonprofit, civic, religious, philanthropic,

business, and government entities as well as elected officials. We hope it will serve as an introductory roadmap for the receiving communities movement and those looking to support it.

The conference and this report are not the endpoint but only the beginning. The Receiving Communities Initiative has much more planned in the months and years ahead, beginning with the release of the Receiving Communities Toolkit at the 2011 National Immigrant Integration Conference in Seattle, Washington, in October. The toolkit will provide proven strategies, activities, and tools for community actors trying to reduce unease between immigrants and the native born, and to build community cohesion. In the future RCI will release a website and online community for practitioners and academics to share best practices, tools, and research, and be at the forefront of future meetings and publications.

Together these resources will better enable local entities to pursue a more proactive approach to managing the uncertainty and fear present in many immigrant-receiving communities. Our vision for America is one in which mutual respect and cooperation prevails between foreign-born and native-born residents, and where immigrants feel welcome and are fully integrated into the fabric of their adopted hometowns. To join this budding movement, go to [www.welcomingamerica.org/rci](http://www.welcomingamerica.org/rci) to gain access to tools and join the virtual community!

David Lubell  
Executive Director, Welcoming America  
September 2011

# Introduction and summary

Historically, immigrant integration has focused on immigrants—on changing immigrant behavior to facilitate their incorporation into the host society by encouraging language learning or naturalization, for example. Accordingly, service providers working with immigrants typically emphasize programs for English language acquisition, citizenship preparation, or integration of immigrants into the workplace.

But positive community relations require the concerted action of both immigrant and native-born residents. How can we expect immigrants to integrate successfully if they feel unwelcome or if their neighbors are not prepared to accept them? And how can we expect their neighbors to welcome them if no effort is made to manage the confusion, fear, and anxiety these neighbors feel about the changing nature of community life? Receiving communities—the places, along with their residents, in which newcomers settle—must be engaged before we can expect them to embrace immigrants.

This report is a call to action for such engagement—for reorienting discussions around immigration to local integration challenges and for proactively bridging the gaps between native and newcomer. It builds on the first meeting of the Receiving Communities Initiative, a gathering of leading academics, practitioners, advocates, and local, state, and national officials in Washington D.C. in December 2010, to examine the role of receiving communities in immigrant integration and reinvigorate immigrant integration in America.

The goal of this report is to help local communities wrestling with the challenges of immigrant settlement. It focuses on helping them identify programs they can emulate and build on, and encouraging national, state, and local policymakers, as well as philanthropic and civic actors, to focus more attention and resources on immigrant-receiving communities as well as immigrants.

The challenge for communities is to acknowledge the very real changes that are occurring within them and their potentially destabilizing nature, and to develop the right kinds of intervention to foster interaction and positive relations between native and foreign-born residents and their children.

Our report is drawn from the experiences of a diverse group of people keenly engaged with immigrant integration. It identifies four key strategies for receiving communities:

1. **Encouraging leadership** to address the changes that take place locally and to manage them effectively. When mainstream leaders who are respected in their communities support immigrant integration efforts it sends powerful signals to the broader community. The support of such leaders strengthens the credibility and likelihood of success of integration efforts. Identifying and mobilizing local-level leaders is a critical part of engaging local communities in reaching out to new immigrant residents and integrating them into the larger receiving community. These leaders do not need any particular background or profession, but they have to be optimistic, passionate about their communities, embedded in their communities' social networks, and willing to reach out to people with sometimes very different points of view.
2. **Fostering contact** between immigrants and the native born. A major step in reinforcing a sense of commonality and community between foreign-born and native-born residents is to create opportunities for contact and communication. Evidence shows that having direct contact with immigrants changes people's perceptions of immigrants and immigration. Immigrants themselves also look to their native-born neighbors for cues on how to fit in and how to behave in American society. Creating spaces for immigrants and native born to interact, and to recognize their common goals for the community and future, is critical to the success of receiving communities.
3. **Building partnerships** between state and local governments and new residents. The most successful local initiatives bring together nonprofits and private-sector actors with people from the public sector. Having local government representatives at the table is important because they have responsibilities that touch the lives of all residents, including immigrants, in areas such as health, schooling, and policing. They also have a set of resources—existing programming, professionals that staff their agencies, and venues to communicate with the public through websites, newsletters, and public offices—that help shape immigrant integration.

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4. **Reframing the issues** to counter misconceptions about immigrants. Native-born residents' misunderstandings of immigrants greatly affect how receiving communities deal with immigrants, and they must be addressed. Most people, in fact, are persuadable. In conversations about immigration it may seem that the loudest voices are often those advocating for the restriction of immigration or the passage of state and local laws that make life for all immigrants, documented or undocumented, more difficult. Still, local coalitions of native-born and immigrant residents can work to reframe the issues both by personalizing immigrants to allow them to be seen as "one of us" so that the focus of the debate shifts from immigration restriction to immigrant integration.

These strategies will not work the same way in all cases and in all communities. Indeed, community-based programs that develop organically are by definition tailored to local circumstances and tend to respond to the unique needs of that community. A companion toolkit for receiving communities with more detailed discussion of local practices and more practical guidance will be released in October of 2011.

This report also focuses on two main challenges to developing and continuing receiving communities work: *program assessment* (or "How do we know programs work as advertised?") and *scaling up* (or "How do we implement successful programs more widely?") We argue that groups active in receiving communities work must develop what researchers call a "culture of evaluation," in which program evaluation is the norm rather than the exception. Doing so will allow local and national actors to be able to accurately gauge how effective their programs are, and what strategies might be transferable elsewhere.

While localities around the country struggle with similar anxieties about how to integrate immigrants, solutions tend to be arrived at community by community. This is why programs for immigrant integration have until recently almost all been local. The shift from a single local arena across various localities and states is still largely uncharted territory. The question is how these local experiences can lead to broader solutions for communities across the country.

Our report considers a number of potential models for replicating results, including a networked affiliate model, with a central organization overseeing local and state affiliates; a federated organizational style, with multiple chapters of a single national organization; or even national coordinating conferences, that bring together disparate groups in a loose confederation.

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Finally, we include a series of policy recommendations for influencers at multiple levels of government and civil society:

1. Even in the absence of comprehensive immigration reform, the **federal government** plays a central role in facilitating immigrant integration. We believe that all federal integration programs and policy should take receiving communities into account. Many federal programs—funding adult literacy, educating children, providing information on naturalization, and easing refugees into the job market—help integrate immigrants into American society. But few of these programs address integration directly, and almost none address the anxieties of receiving communities or try to engage residents in the longer-term process of immigrant integration. We support the allocation of greater resources for immigrant integration and refugee resettlement that are specifically directed to groups working with receiving communities, to encourage positive interactions between natives and newcomers.
2. **State and local governments** are often on the front lines of integration. A number of states and cities have active offices for immigrant affairs, but the economic downturn has severely harmed the efforts of these facilities. The demographic changes taking place, and the need to focus efforts on relations between immigrant and native-born residents, mean that states and localities should expand funding efforts at immigrant integration—including support for nongovernmental community-building efforts, publicly subsidized English language classes, and in-state tuition—even with state and local resources stretched thin. They should treat these as investments in their states’ longer-term social and economic well-being. As on the federal level, state and local governments can insist that providers operating under their aegis write receiving communities programs into their service agreements.
3. **Nongovernmental actors** have long been significant players in providing services and aid to immigrant communities. The receiving communities’ perspective on immigrant integration is still new, though, and often the organizational infrastructure that localities have built—both for addressing the needs of the native born as well as the requirements of immigrant newcomers—needs to reorient itself to the challenge. NGOs must realize that they need the support of the native community for integration to be successful instead of simply reaching out to their base of immigrants and immigrant supporters. This cultural shift can seem counterintuitive, and it may run counter to funding and constitutional mandates. Nevertheless, a focus on receiving communities will lay the groundwork for success, and it ultimately will make all other parts of the resettlement and integration efforts easier.

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4. Like NGOs, **funders and foundations** have been at the forefront of immigrant integration work. Still, many tend to overlook addressing native-born anxieties about immigration. Funders can help provide the resources to bring newcomers and older residents together, evaluate which programs are most promising, and support the organizational models needed to implement successful local innovations on a broader scale. Corporate sponsors should also recognize the value that a focus on immigrant integration through receiving communities can have. Governmental and nongovernmental organizations can only do so much, and business owners are often leaders in their community, which gives them significant leverage over jumpstarting receiving communities work. These sponsors also have a strong financial incentive to create harmony between immigrant and newcomer, and to make sure that all residents are benefiting economically and consuming local goods and services.

Taking the broader historical view, immigrants are an essential part of the fabric of our nation and have shaped the American national identity. Our society has not only survived the influx of new and different peoples but has thrived as a result. The process of immigrant integration and acceptance is often bumpy and messy, but we believe that a focus on receiving communities will smooth out that process, and help to make sure that immigrants and the native born can together fully take part in the American Dream.

## Two communities: A case study

Imagine two cities. Both are relatively small, with roughly 26,000 and 50,000 people, respectively. Neither was a historic destination for immigrants, but each saw a rapid influx of newcomers in the last few years. The larger of the two cities received a large contingent of Somalis beginning early in the new millennium, ushering a significant population of Muslim residents into a heavily Christian area. The smaller received a large contingent of Latino residents starting around 2008 in a historically white area, with immigrants drawn to the local meatpacking industry.

In both communities the initial response was unease. Many feared that the new immigrants would change their way of life, challenge their sense of identity, and harm the local economy. But despite their apparent similarities the two cities traveled along widely divergent paths.

In the smaller city, Fremont, Nebraska, the town reacted negatively to an influx of undocumented immigrants. The town council began considering an ordinance to control unauthorized immigration in 2009, though ultimately tabled it. But after a state court forced the city to hold a public referendum on the immigration ordinance, it passed in mid-2010. The law penalizes people without status and prohibits landlords from renting to people without legal status, subject to high fines. It also requires using the federal government's E-Verify program to verify the status of workers for all employers in the town.<sup>1</sup> The legal expenses to defend the law have averaged \$1 million a year, and they have forced the town to increase its taxes to compensate.

Kirstin Ostrom, a local organizer who led the campaign against the referendum, argues that the issue went beyond simply passing legislation, stating: “Even if we say ‘no’ [to the referendum] we still need to say: ‘How do we get along with each other now?’”<sup>2</sup>

At first the larger city, Lewiston, Maine, reacted with similar hostility to the Somali refugees who settled there. Former Mayor Laurier T. Raymond Jr. sparked criti-

cism in 2002 when he argued that his town had “been overwhelmed” by the new immigrants, and pushed for an end to their arrival.<sup>3</sup>

But Lewiston ultimately took a different route than Fremont. In response to tensions between natives and newcomers the city stepped up its efforts to integrate its immigrants, promoting English as a Second Language acquisition, job training, and skills development among the immigrants to permit them to participate more actively in the economic and cultural life of Lewiston. Lewiston also worked with its schools to ensure that the children of immigrants kept up academically and to anticipate and dampen any racial conflicts that could arise.

Importantly, Lewiston’s leadership educated the larger community about the new immigrants to dispel myths about them and explain the circumstances that prompted their move to the United States. This attempt to engage newcomers and native-born residents within the receiving community in ongoing dialogue has been particularly important to integration efforts.

The results of the two approaches are strikingly different. As the current mayor of Lewiston, Laurent F. Gilbert, Sr., argues, “our immigrant entrepreneurs are bringing new life and energy to the downtown. In a couple of downtown blocks of our main street, over a dozen immigrant-owned businesses occupy formerly vacant storefronts.” The Somali immigrants reversed a downward population trend that had been occurring for half a century, and they brought new consumers, taxpayers, and business owners to the city.<sup>4</sup> Fremont, by contrast, is still struggling to answer Ostrom’s question.

Challenges and opportunities happen simultaneously with immigrants, and tensions between native and immigrant can be triggered by any number of things: the visibility of immigrant day laborers lining up in public places looking for work, the number of immigrant children in schools, disputes over bilingual or non-English signage in public places, or even the building of new religious sites such as mosques.

How, then, can we ensure that the future will look more like Lewiston and less like Fremont? How can we ensure that communities respond with positive attempts to integrate native and newcomer rather than costly and harsh anti-immigrant legislation? Learning from the successes and failures of cities like these is the key to arming receiving communities with the tools they need to minimize tension and integrate newcomers as successfully as possible for the benefit of the entire community.

“Our immigrant entrepreneurs are bringing new life and energy to the downtown.”

– Laurent F. Gilbert,  
Sr., Mayor, City of  
Lewiston, Maine

# More U.S. communities are dealing with immigration

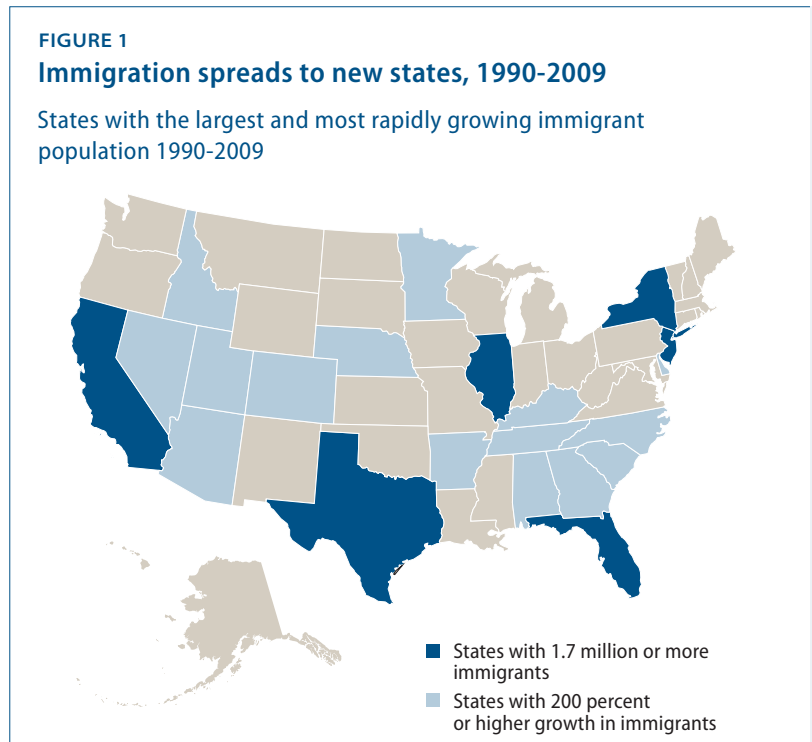
Of the approximately 311 million residents of the United States, 39 million are foreign born. Immigration has increased steadily over the last 60 years, and the United States currently receives over a million new legal immigrants every year.

Numerically there are a greater number of immigrants today than ever before, but the foreign-born population comprise only about 13 percent of the U.S. population. That is below the peak of roughly 15 percent reached during the last great wave of immigration around the turn of the 20th century.

Of the 39 million foreign-born residents in the United States, 17 million are naturalized citizens. About half of those who are not citizens, 11 million, are estimated to be undocumented—without the authorization to live or work in the United States. The other half are either legal permanent residents or temporary residents, such as students.<sup>5</sup>

Immigration has over many decades been concentrated in particular states like California, Illinois, Texas, New York, and Florida, which continue to receive the lion's share of immigration. But as immigration has peaked it has become increasingly dispersed to metropolitan areas scattered throughout the country—including many states, cities, and neighborhoods that experienced little if any immigration over the last century.<sup>6</sup> (Figure 1)

The seven states experiencing the most rapid change between 1990 and 2009 were North Carolina, Georgia, Arkansas,



Source: MPI, available at <http://www.migrationinformation.org/DataHub/maps.cfm>.

Nevada, Tennessee, South Carolina, and Nebraska. None of these had been significant magnets for immigration before 1990. In each state the immigrant population increased by at least 200 percent during the period—essentially doubling and then doubling again.

This unprecedented dispersion of immigrants to new destinations across the country compels us to focus on the new types of communities where immigrants are settling and how to support natives and immigrants in the integration effort.

### Immigrants aren't that different from the rest of us

Much of the current debate on immigration is centered on the issue of unauthorized or “illegal” immigrants. But more than two out of every three foreign-born residents in the United States are legal residents. (see Figure 2) Policy debates can obscure the fact that most immigrants—the large majority of whom arrived in the United States through legal channels—remain here and become citizens, by focusing on unauthorized immigration to the exclusion of other issues. Even the vast majority of the undocumented (62 percent) have been here for more than a decade.<sup>7</sup>

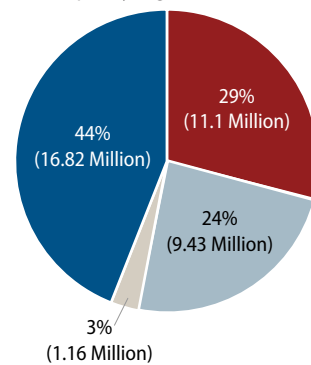
Almost all residents, regardless of their immigration status, make clear their intention to settle down in America. This makes their integration into the neighborhoods and communities where they live all the more pressing.<sup>8</sup>

Contemporary debates also obscure the fact that the demographic changes taking place across the United States today are driven as much or more by the children of immigrants as by immigrants themselves. Figure 3 illustrates that by 2009 almost one out of every four children, or 17.4 million kids, was an immigrant or the child of immigrants. These children are born in the United States and are U.S. citizens.

**FIGURE 2**  
**Legal status of immigrants to the United States**

2011

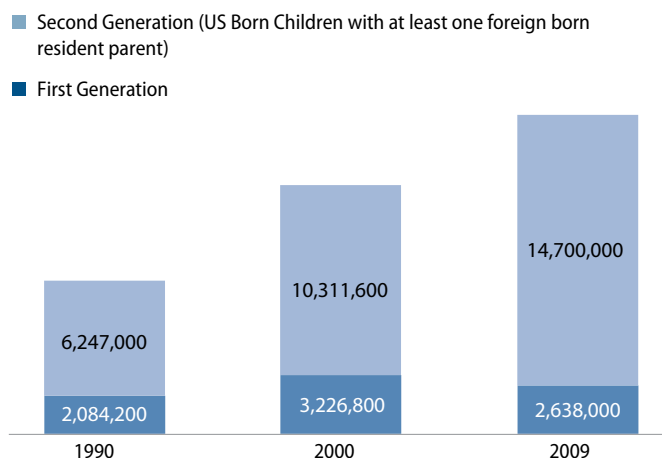
- Naturalized Citizens
- Unauthorized Migrants
- Legal Permanent Residents
- Temporary Legal Residents



Source: Migration Information Source 2011; Passel, 2006.<sup>9</sup>

**FIGURE 3**  
**Immigrant children on the rise**

Number of children under age 18 in the United States, 1990, 2000, and 2009



Source: Child Trends Data Bank, [www.childtrendsdatabank.org](http://www.childtrendsdatabank.org).<sup>13</sup>

In 2009 these second-generation immigrant children outnumbered first-generation children by more than six to one.

The stakes, then, are incredibly high. These American-born children will grow up in a context shaped by how well their parents are able to integrate into the United States.<sup>10</sup>

It goes without saying that our country is undergoing a dramatic demographic shift. By the year 2050 there will no longer be an ethnic majority in the United States. The Census Bureau projections are significant and startling: By 2050 the Hispanic population is expected to nearly triple, the Asian American population more than triple, and the African American population to rise by 71 percent. Meanwhile, the non-Hispanic white population is not expected to post dramatic gains in the same period.

These demographic changes highlight the fact that as more immigrants and their descendants settle here, it is all the more imperative to engage in efforts to stave off potential conflicts in the communities in which they will live.<sup>12</sup>



South Ocean Middle School students from Patchogue, New York, recite the Pledge of Allegiance before their school assembly about Marcelo Lucero, the immigrant killed by local high school students in 2008.

JACKSON HILL PHOTOGRAPHY

# Receiving communities are anxious about immigrants and immigration

The rapid rise and dispersal of U.S. immigration over the last several decades has been accompanied by considerable ambivalence about immigrants and their role in American society. Heated political rhetoric from all sides, exacerbated by the current recession, portrays these anxieties as the legitimate economic concern of Americans struggling to make ends meet.<sup>13</sup> But as fears about immigrants have risen since the 1990s it has become clear that the issue is not dependent on economic conditions alone.<sup>14</sup>

The first challenge, then, is to address longer-term residents' worries about the dislocations wrought by large-scale immigration.

Public opinion data illustrates that native-born residents hold deeply conflicting feelings about immigrants and their place in American society. Respondents consistently tell Gallup pollsters that they believe that undocumented immigrants cost taxpayers too much, and they strongly believe that the United States needs to control its borders to stop illegal entry. And yet when native-born residents are asked what the government's policies toward immigrants should be only a small minority believes that all undocumented immigrants should be deported, while two-thirds of respondents to Gallup polls believe that most should remain in the United States and become citizens.<sup>15</sup>

Whether touching on the economy, crime, or society, significant percentages of the native born believe that recent immigration is a negative influence on American society even if they believe that immigrants themselves are industrious and generally work in jobs that Americans are not willing to do.

It is important to note that even though these concerns may be deeply felt they do not line up with the reality of immigration in America. University of California, Davis economist Giovanni Peri, for example, has argued that "There is no evidence that immigrants crowd out U.S. born workers in the short or long run," and that "Immigration to the United States from 1990 to 2007 was associated with a

6.6 percent to 9.9 percent increase in real income per worker.”<sup>16</sup> Similarly, research on the link between immigration and crime rates concludes that crime rates actually drop in areas with a higher percentage of foreign-born residents.<sup>17</sup> Further, all the available data on language acquisition indicates that immigrants and their children learn English and that within a single generation the children of immigrants become English dominant.<sup>18</sup>

Still, the anxieties native-born residents experience are no less real even though there is research consensus on the generally positive impact of immigration.<sup>19</sup> Many Americans are reacting uneasily to the rapid changes they see taking place around them and feel nostalgia for a more comforting definition of home that is rapidly disappearing for a whole host of reasons—demographic, economic, social, and cultural. Immigrants are one group some seek to blame for these changes, and they can become a flashpoint for individuals who feel they have lost control.

For instance, when a long-time resident struggling to deal with labor market disruptions hears a foreign language spoken in the grocery store or sees signs he cannot read this may exacerbate his general sense of alienation. Not helping matters is the fact that many of the negative opinions that long-time residents hold of immigrants in their communities are a product of sensationalistic media that tends to focus on the minority of “bad apples” as opposed to the majority of strong contributors.

When these and other anxieties within the receiving community are not addressed, the tensions can spin out of control, leading at times to destructive individual actions such as hate crimes, or to reactionary collective actions such as the punitive state and local policies that have proliferated over the past several years.

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# Dramatic state and local policy reactions to immigration

Rapid changes in immigration have spurred both positive and negative reactions in local communities. But more often than not immigration has prompted passage of state-level legislation that penalizes immigrants.

Some states and localities are taking matters into their own hands and seeking to regulate immigration within their borders in the face of inaction to repair what is widely perceived to be a broken immigration system at the federal level. This is despite the fact that passing these laws may exceed their legitimate authority because immigration is a federal responsibility under the Constitution.

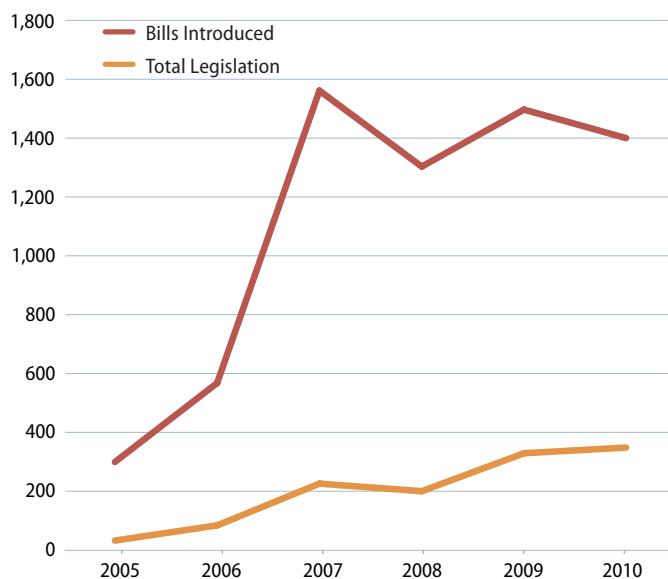
Figure 4 shows the dramatic increase in the number of immigration bills introduced and legislation enacted in state legislatures from 2005 to 2010. The total number of bills introduced quadrupled and the number of bills enacted increased tenfold during this six-year period. A majority of this legislation was designed to discourage illegal immigration, most notably Arizona's S.B. 1070.<sup>20</sup>

This legislative activity at the state and local level is mostly anti-immigration. But some states chose to emphasize immigrant integration and the value of immigrants to their states' vibrancy and economic health.

Utah's state legislature, for example, while supporting an expanded role in federal immigration enforcement for local law enforcement, also issued a "compact" outlining the state's commitment to the inclusion of immigrants.<sup>21</sup> Four states—Alaska, Montana,

**FIGURE 4**  
**States take matters into their own hands**

Immigration-Related Legislation Introduced and Enacted at the State Level, 2005-2010



Source: National Conference of State Legislatures, Immigrant Policy Project available at <http://www.ncsl.org/default.aspx?tabid=21857>.

New Mexico, and Oregon—explicitly prohibit the use of state resources for the purpose of immigration enforcement.<sup>22</sup> And Maryland and Connecticut recently approved measures that will allow some unauthorized immigrants to pay in-state tuition in state colleges and universities, joining 10 other states, while Illinois proposed establishing a scholarship fund for the children of immigrants seeking to attend college.<sup>23</sup>

The fight over the federal government’s Secure Communities program—under which immigrants booked into county jails have their fingerprints and identifying information sent to the Department of Homeland Security for immigrant status verification—illustrates the difficulties of imposing an enforcement regime on communities that may otherwise choose to focus on integration. The government bills the program as targeting violent criminals, but in reality many of those caught by Secure Communities have committed no crimes or minor offenses. The program has become the face of current attempts to control immigration enforcement at the federal level.<sup>24</sup>

Three states—New York, Illinois, and Massachusetts—publicly stated that they will not participate in the program because of concerns over racial profiling and the deportation of innocent residents, though the federal government has insisted that participation is mandatory.

What is most notable is that even the most welcoming of federal, state, and local policies tend to discount the needs of receiving communities and do little to build relationships between new arrivals and existing residents. What can be done to bolster receiving communities, reduce anxieties in the U.S. born community, and foster these connections?

# Key strategies for receiving communities

The experiences of participants on the ground suggest four key strategies to successfully address the anxieties of the native born and foster the integration of new immigrants into receiving communities:

1. Encourage leadership to address the changes taking place locally and manage them effectively
2. Foster contact between immigrants and the native born
3. Build partnerships between state and local government and new residents
4. Reframe the issues to counter misconceptions about immigrants

These strategies will not work the same way in all cases and in all communities. Indeed, community-based programs that develop organically are by definition tailored to local circumstances and tend to respond to the unique needs of that community. The ideas presented here are the suggested practices of a diverse body of innovative integration experts—not a set of hard-and-fast rules. A companion toolkit for receiving communities with more detailed discussion of local practices and more practical guidance will be released by the Spring Institute in collaboration with Welcoming America in October of 2011.

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## Encouraging local leadership

“Leadership comes first,” says David Lubell, executive director of Welcoming America, a national umbrella group working to encourage immigrant integration and a focus on receiving communities. “Everything else flows from this.”<sup>25</sup>

Sustained contact between older residents and new arrivals requires local leaders to step in and take a primary role. When mainstream leaders who are respected in their communities support immigrant integration efforts it sends powerful signals to the broader community that changing demographics brings opportunity and that change can be managed. The support of such leaders strengthens the credibility and likelihood of success of integration efforts whether the leaders hail from the local government, business, or faith sectors.

“Leadership comes first. Everything else flows from this.”

– David Lubell,  
Executive Director,  
Welcoming America

For this reason, identifying and mobilizing local-level leaders is a critical part of engaging local communities in reaching out to new immigrant residents and integrating them into the larger receiving community.

Eric Ward, the former national field director at the Center for New Community, a nationwide community-building organization, shared an anecdote at the RCI meeting about a town meeting with a decidedly hostile, anti-immigrant tone. The meeting continued this way until an influential community member changed the tone: “Someone spoke up... who was well known and respected in the community. He was not a local leader, just someone who was well respected in the community and was mad that folks were talking about his friend in a negative way and spoke out. And his speaking out changed the whole atmosphere.”<sup>26</sup>

Every community has natural leaders—influential people who can drive public opinion and rally followers. The challenge is how to engage them and move them off the sidelines.

Certain circumstances cry out for leadership. In Manassas, Virginia immigration restrictionists opposed the city’s day laborer site, won a majority of seats on the city council, and then proceeded to restrict undocumented immigrants’ access to employment, housing, and services.

Initially few voices were raised on the immigrants’ behalf. But local pastors began working quietly behind the scenes to raise their concerns with elected officials in what they saw as a nonconfrontational, nonpartisan way. These efforts stemmed from the work of Reverend Jeff Carter of the Manassas Church of the Brethren, who began first by inviting a small group of other clergy to think about how to frame a public conversation about immigrants in their community. Once the effort became public these pastors remained publicly engaged.<sup>27</sup>

## Encouraging leadership: Reverend Jeff Carter, Manassas, Virginia

In June 2007, John Stirrup, a county supervisor of Prince William, Virginia, introduced a resolution targeting immigrants in the county. The law would have cut off undocumented immigrants from accessing local social services and forced police officers to check the immigration status of anyone in their custody or anyone they suspected of being without status. This resolution came after restrictionists in Manassas, Virginia attempted to shut down the city's day laborer site.

In the poisoned atmosphere that followed, Reverend Jeff Carter of the Manassas Church of the Brethren stepped in to reframe the conversation and create a public dialogue for his congregation. Reverend Carter had been in Manassas for 12 years and recognized that as the head of a local church he was also a leader in the community.

Carter started small, bringing together other local pastors to brainstorm what they could do to help the community. He and his colleagues then held a prayer service, and finally wrote a public letter asking the community to drop their negative rhetoric and instead work toward constructive solutions.

Carter realized that as the chaplain for the County Department of Fire and Rescue, he held a unique position to inform and educate the public. As he puts it, "What I found is people just wanted the truth and they weren't getting the truth...from the news and so we started to build."<sup>28</sup>

Critically, Carter framed his support not simply as someone speaking for immigrants or church-goers but "as an advocate for the community [as a whole], not just one segment of the community." He created a space for Manassas residents to understand that they all belonged to one group with common goals rather than to competing populations.

In the end, public pressure, especially that created by Reverend Carter, helped to scale back the immigration law and dampen its effects on immigrants in Prince William County. The example of Manassas illustrates just how important it is to have local leaders take the reins of receiving community work.

Houses of worship are often involved in refugee resettlement and immigrant service work, and they can play a key role in influencing local opinion because their advocacy on behalf of immigrant integration is rooted in a value system that resonates with the wider receiving community. As Reverend Carter noted, engaging churches is relatively easy: "The ground is already tilled."<sup>29</sup>

Other organizations prevent a negative climate from taking hold in the first place. They intentionally focus on recruiting and cultivating diverse leadership, helping these leaders learn about the issues, and building contact with newcomers.

The Littleton Immigrant Integration Initiative in Colorado began with city efforts to think about how to accommodate immigrant newcomers. The city established a Diversity Committee, set up new procedures for the courts and police mindful of new immigrant residents' needs, and organized voluntary cultural awareness "Lunch and Learn" sessions for staff. The public library also began offering a series of classes for immigrants: English as a Second Language, conversational English, citizenship, and more. Additionally, city officials heard the personal narratives of local immigrants at a staff retreat.<sup>30</sup> Many participants in these efforts wanted to stay involved. More than 50 people volunteered to continue and underwent training as community leaders.<sup>31</sup>

Littleton's efforts are notable because of the degree of engagement by all facets of city government, which led to extraordinary participation by volunteers from the native community. In fact, every immigrant resident in Littleton who sought naturalization was paired with a native civics tutor, which helped the naturalization process and fostered deep communication between immigrants and natives.

In a similar but much larger effort, the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, or ICIRR, has just started an ambitious program called Neighbor to Neighbor with significant support from the state, which is recruiting thousands of volunteers from the native community to teach English and civics to immigrants across the state. The effort also involves leadership training for community leaders and volunteers engaging in these integration efforts. ICIRR believes that volunteers who help out in the program will end up with a deeper understanding of, and empathy for, immigrants in their community.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, leadership can emerge from tragic circumstances. The documentary film "Not In Our Town III: Light in the Darkness" follows the town of Patchogue, New York, after the 2008 killing of Latino immigrant Marcelo Lucero by local high school students. In the racially charged atmosphere that followed a diverse set of leaders stepped up to counter the divisiveness and anger, and repair badly damaged relations in the town.

The film chronicles the hard work of these immigrant and native leaders to heal their community. Paul Pontieri, the mayor of Patchogue, began a campaign to urge residents from all walks of life to confront hate and bias, while the victim's brother, Joselo Lucero, became a leader for the immigrant community and a bridge to the native born. Not In Our Town's films about confronting hate air on PBS nationally and have become the cornerstone of a national campaign to counter bigotry with positive action to foster a sense of unity in communities torn apart by hate and violence.<sup>33</sup>

Community leaders hail from all walks of life, as these examples show. They do not need any particular background or profession, but they have to be optimistic, passionate about their communities, embedded in their communities' social networks, and willing to reach out to people with sometimes very different points of view.<sup>34</sup>

Community leaders hail from all walks of life, they have to be optimistic, passionate about their communities, embedded in their communities' social networks, and willing to reach out to people with sometimes very different points of view.

# Fostering contact between immigrants and the native born

The first step in reinforcing a sense of commonality and community between foreign-born and native-born residents is to create opportunities for contact and communication. Many long-term residents resist the changes taking place in their hometowns and are deeply uncomfortable at the sight of people who do not look or sound like them. In such a context, ambivalence, if not outright alienation, can thrive. But there is reason for hope.

Evidence shows that having direct contact with immigrants changes people's perceptions of immigrants and immigration. One cross-national survey found that a majority of those with immigrant friends see immigration as an opportunity, while a majority of those with no social contact with immigrants see them as a problem.<sup>35</sup> Immigrants themselves look to their native-born neighbors for cues on how to fit in and how to behave in American society. But if what they perceive is that "fitting in" means largely keeping to themselves, then meaningful interaction between newcomers and the native born is unlikely to occur.<sup>36</sup>

Many of the initial programs designed to establish communication between immigrants and long-time residents were started by local secular and religious nongovernmental organizations. The Colorado Trust in Denver, for example, funded 19 grantees in the state to bring together native born and recent immigrants to address immigrant integration. At one of its sites in Leadville, Colorado, with a population of about 4,000, their efforts led to more than 150 people gathering to talk about "what immigration meant to them and what they wanted to see their community become."<sup>37</sup>

These kinds of dialogues begin with small planning groups with representatives from the receiving community and the new immigrant groups to help collaboratively design the agenda for the meetings, building outwards to bring more and more people into these conversations.<sup>38</sup>

One cross-national survey found that a majority of those with immigrant friends see immigration as an opportunity, while a majority of those with no social contact with immigrants see them as a problem.



CITY OF LEWISTON, MAINE

Fresh carrots are bagged at the Hillview Apartments community garden in Lewiston, Maine. The community garden is part of a network of gardens across the city of Lewiston established by Lots to Gardens, a youth and community driven organization that works to eliminate barriers to fresh food by teaching members of the community how to grow and cook their own food.

In Littleton, Colorado, a steering committee made up of representatives from major public and nonprofit agencies and organizations put together a large community conversation between longer-term residents and new immigrants that was structured around dialogues identifying why they liked living in Littleton. The breakthrough at the town hall meeting, which organizer Susan Thornton, the former mayor of Littleton, referred to as an “aha moment,” occurred when every resident—old and new—gave the same reasons for enjoying life in Littleton. Immigrants and natives “valued Littleton for the same qualities: being a clean, safe, friendly community with excellent schools, abundant parks and other amenities.”<sup>39</sup>

This realization of shared aspirations and values led to a variety of new volunteer programs to help immigrants integrate into the city’s civic life, including programs that matched immigrants one-on-one with established residents to help them with the challenges of adapting to the United States.

“Our thinking,” says Thornton, “was that mutual understanding and friendships would evolve as people learned about one another’s culture.”<sup>40</sup>

## Fostering contact between immigrants and the native born: The Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians

The Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians has been helping immigrants in the greater Philadelphia area since 2003, assisting more than 8,000 people from over 140 countries. The need for new initiatives for the Philadelphia area has only grown over time: Between 2000 and 2006, 113,000 immigrants settled there.

The center focuses primarily on economic development. It helps immigrants with work authorization find jobs and U.S.-born and immigrant entrepreneurs launch and expand their businesses. Welcoming Center services include education and training, vocational English classes, citizenship preparation, direct job placement, small business development, and legal consultations. Its programs and services deliberately foster cross-ethnic collaboration between immigrant and native-born residents.

At the meeting of the Receiving Communities Initiative in December 2010, Anne O'Callaghan, the president and CEO of the center, spoke of the challenges of fostering contact between immigrants and the native born, stating that "both our communities have their own stereotypes of the other." The diverse immigrant population in Philadelphia makes one-size-fits-all programming difficult.

O'Callaghan described the agency's pioneering English for Entrepreneurs program, which helps business owners build better relations with their American-born customers: "We discovered that the curriculum has to be customized to the ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the immigrant group that we're working with."

In one notable community dialogue, the Welcoming Center focused on the 52nd Street neighborhood in West Philadelphia, where the receiving community was largely African American. The center spent six months on the ground identifying informal community leaders and laying the groundwork for the event, including contracting with trained facilitators who could keep the discussion on track and focusing on finding potential solutions to community tensions between immigrants and African Americans.

One hundred people, half immigrants and half born in the United States, attended the town hall meeting and a subsequent roundtable discussion. Among the outcomes of the meeting were requests from many attendees for a neighborhood-based resource center. After a year of planning and fundraising, the Welcoming Center opened a new location just off of the 52nd Street commercial corridor.

Today, the fruits of that work pay small but steady dividends. Ms. O'Callaghan notes that "Many immigrant businesses are now part of the local business association, which had previously been made up of mostly native-born business owners." To her, it is an important signal that cross-community relationships are taking root in Philadelphia.

Similarly, the Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians, an economic and workforce development organization in Philadelphia, has organized town hall meetings in the Philadelphia region that have brought together a wide spectrum of participants ranging from members of the business community to local immigrant restrictionists to representatives from various immigrant communities. These conversations focused on common goals and aspirations for the future. The Welcoming Center also works with the student-age population in Philadelphia, bringing together immigrant and native-born students to lessen racial and ethnic tensions.

In most instances, community conversations work best when trust is built between the two communities. But in some instances the situation is so tense it takes time to bring everyone together. Here it is not only the official meetings themselves that help foster positive dialogues between immigrants and new-

comers but also the lead-up to these meetings. According to Amanda Bergson-Shilcock of the Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians, “What happens before the meeting is more important than what happens at the meeting itself.”<sup>41</sup>

Anne O’Callaghan, the founding president and CEO of the Welcoming Center, emphasized the intense preparation that a community meeting can entail: “It took about six months of on-the-ground work identifying block captains, identifying, trying to find the real community leaders, who are the go-to people... And then we trained facilitators and had very specific questions for discussion.”

Especially in situations where trust in local institutions is already frayed, organizers have to build relationships in the neighborhood before any meeting can take place so that participants can speak honestly with one another when they do come together. This process may take time if the atmosphere is tense.

O’Callaghan, however, believes that this hard work pays off. The presence of trained facilitators from the Welcoming Center helped participants to stay focused on generating solutions. Instead of simply providing a platform to air grievances, the community conversation produced a “tangible improvement” in the community.<sup>42</sup>

But community dialogues are only one way to foster contact between immigrants and native-born residents. The Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights’s Neighbor to Neighbor program, or N2N, leverage a significant number of AmeriCorps volunteers to strengthen volunteer recruitment and organize community meetings that bring immigrants and natives together. Through the program immigrants have the opportunity to improve their English language skills and prepare for the citizenship test by working one-on-one with volunteers from the native population.

The true advantage of N2N, however, is that it provides a setting for bringing natives and immigrants together and forming lasting relationships. Lisa Thakkar, formerly of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, explains that though the program is a “small step,” it allows immigrants and nonimmigrant volunteers to “really start building connections.” This is a critical step in breaking down stereotypes and creating a common community vision.<sup>43</sup>

Fostering contact can be even more powerful when multiple immigrant groups are part of the process. Bringing together groups such as Asian Americans, Latino

Bringing together groups such as Asian Americans, Latino Americans, Muslim Americans, and white residents helps to ensure that no one group ends up cut off from the rest of society.



Laurent F. Gilbert, Sr., Mayor of Lewiston, Maine, plants tulips with the city's youth.

CITY OF LEWISTON, MAINE

Americans, Muslim Americans, and white residents helps to ensure that no one group ends up cut off from the rest of society. And it eases the barriers toward integration.

Michael Byun, executive director of Asian Services in Action, Inc. of Ohio, is working to break what he terms “a clear ‘black and white’ dichotomy in political and policy discourse” in his state. His agency, especially through its American Dream Fund, works to bring multiple ethnic and immigrant communities into dialogue through programs such as cultural competency trainings and workshops. More than anything else, Byun argues that welcoming communities require “strategy[ies] of meaningful engagement and cultural exchange.”<sup>44</sup>

One-time events that bridge populations are important, but each of the aforementioned efforts is designed to lead to sustained interaction between newer and older residents. They aim to take the form of working on group projects together around common issues such as cleaning up a neighborhood or helping to revitalize a local school.

In Littleton participants bonded around qualities they valued in their town, while in West Philadelphia residents rallied around shared perceptions of problems the community faces. But in both instances the initial meetings were designed to let people see beyond the stereotypes they held, to recognize commonalities, and to promote further interaction between longer-term residents and new immigrants. In each case these actions reinforced immigrant integration in a shared community.

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## Building partnerships with state and local government

The most successful local initiatives bring together nonprofits and private-sector actors with people from the public sector. Developing community leaders and pushing them to take part in immigrant integration is important. But equally so is making sure that state and local government officials are actively involved. These officials already serve these populations, have a stake in successful integration, and have the resources to reach a wide range of people.

Having local government representatives at the table is important because they have responsibilities that touch the lives of all residents, including immigrants, in areas such as health, schooling, and policing. They also have a set of resources—existing programming, the professionals that staff their agencies, and venues to communicate with the public through websites, newsletters, and public offices—that help shape immigrant integration.

In California, for instance, the Institute for Local Government—the research and education affiliate of the California State Association of Counties and the League of California Cities, the state’s professional associations for counties and cities—is working with elected leaders and school officials in two municipalities, Redwood City and the City of Oakley, to pilot community bridge-building efforts in conjunction with national partner Welcoming America as well as with local, civic, and religious groups.<sup>45</sup> Their experiences in these pilot projects are being shared with other city managers and councils across the state.<sup>46</sup>

Similarly, the Iowa Immigration Education Coalition, a group dedicated to bringing together a wide range of Iowans to educate them about the impact of immigration on their communities, put together a broad spectrum of local actors ranging from business leaders, labor unions, school officials, religious leaders, non-governmental actors, and health care providers. These also include public-sector actors such as the Iowa Department of Human Rights and the Iowa Civil Rights Commission. The goal of this group is to provide the facts about the effects of

## Fostering immigrant-government partnerships in Lewiston, Maine

Somali refugees began arriving in Lewiston, a small city in southern Maine, in 2001. The community had not traditionally received many immigrants, especially those from Africa, and the presence of a new population created a climate of suspicion.

Then-Mayor Laurier T. Raymond Jr. sparked controversy in 2002 when he argued that his city had “been overwhelmed” by the new immigrants, and he wrote a letter to the Somali community asking them to stop any further migration. In another well-publicized incident a man threw a frozen pig’s head into a Lewiston mosque during morning prayer services.<sup>51</sup>

Ten years down the road, however, the situation in Lewiston has significantly improved. The city instituted a series of welcoming initiatives that increased cooperation between a network of local and state agencies to help provide services to new arrivals.

The current mayor of Lewiston, Laurent Gilbert Sr., took an active role in shifting the conversation about immigrants, demonstrating the role that local government can play in the face of an unexpected influx of immigrants. Under his leadership the availability of immigrant services has increased, and community tensions have eased.

“Collaboration and education are keys to success,” says Gilbert. “As a city, we took the lead in forming collaborative partnerships in order to

service the immigrant population and educate community service providers and community members. Educating all partners on the cultures reduces anxiety and results in more welcoming attitudes as does educating the immigrants on our culture.”<sup>52</sup>

As part of the city’s programming, Lewiston’s schools and police department received diversity training, and the city partnered with Career Services, a state employment agency, to help find work for the new arrivals. The mayor’s office, public schools, and the police department participated in a centralized effort to create a more welcoming atmosphere in Lewiston, which included meetings with the various ethnic groups residing in the city to learn about their needs.

Today, 10 years after the first Somali refugees arrived, the city has a population of 5,000 refugees from Somalia, Kenya, and Sudan. The influx of immigrants helped to reverse Maine’s downward population trend, and the new arrivals brought an entrepreneurial energy that revitalized the town’s economy. Immigrants now reside in formerly vacant apartment buildings and provide much-needed tax dollars to Lewiston.

Mayor Gilbert argues, “the dust truly has settled” with these visibly positive effects and a spirit of increased communication.

immigration in the state through public forums, publications, and their website.<sup>47</sup> Instances of similar coalitions exist around the country.

The leadership of elected officials can make an enormous difference in the climate for relations between immigrant newcomers and established residents. In Lewiston, Maine, Somali refugees were resettled to the city beginning in 2001. They quickly overwhelmed the ability of local service providers to handle the needs of a population with a different language, culture, and set of needs. There were concerns about the increasingly negative opinions native-born residents were expressing. These were symbolized by the then-mayor’s open letter to the Somali community requesting they stop immigrating to the city.<sup>48</sup>

But the city council departed from the mayor’s position, and by 2007 a new mayor was actively recruiting Somalis to serve on city projects and committees.<sup>49</sup> By 2009, Newsweek magazine was celebrating the city’s rebirth due to the Somali refugees and other immigrants.<sup>50</sup>

The leadership of elected officials can make an enormous difference in the climate for relations between immigrant newcomers and established residents.

A number of states and localities have dedicated offices and staff to address immigration issues.<sup>53</sup> But more often there is no one to serve as a liaison to local government, particularly in areas that have only recently seen immigrants arrive.

An official delegate is not necessary to foster immigrant integration. It can be quite helpful, however. One such model is the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs in New York City. The office works explicitly to help ease integration of immigrants into all aspects of New York City life and to make sure there is an institutional channel between immigrants and government. But with or without such a formal office the development of partnerships with local elected and non-elected local officials is a key ingredient for successful local coalitions addressing immigrant integration.

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### Reframing the issues

Native-born residents’ misunderstandings of immigrants greatly affect how receiving communities deal with their immigrants, and they must be addressed.

There is evidence that people do change their minds when presented with accurate information. While Americans consistently overstate the population that is foreign born—believing, according to one study, that 39 percent, rather than 14 percent of Americans, were born elsewhere—once they are told the correct percentage of immigrants in the country their responses about attitudes toward immigration become markedly more positive.<sup>54</sup>

Most people, in fact, are persuadable. In conversations about immigration it may seem that the loudest voices are often those advocating for the restriction of immigration or the passage of state and local laws that make life for all immigrants, documented or undocumented, more difficult. Still, local coalitions of native-born and immigrant residents can work to reframe the issues by personalizing immigrants to allow them to be seen as “one of us” and by using objective information so that the focus of the debate shifts from immigration restriction to immigrant integration.

Reverend Jeff Carter of the Manassas Church of the Brethren argues that “While it is difficult to change human nature, education and efforts to assimilate new communities help to relieve such fears.”<sup>55</sup>

In conversations about immigration it may seem that the loudest voices are often those advocating for the restriction of immigration or the passage of state and local laws that make life for all immigrants, documented or undocumented, more difficult.

Reframing the debate is crucial but challenging, and local efforts take different approaches. Many groups, such as the Iowa Immigration Coalition, have emphasized putting together a broad spectrum of local actors ranging from business leaders, labor unions, school officials, religious leaders, nongovernmental actors, and health care providers to provide “a fact based approach to sharing information about immigration and immigrants in Iowa” by organizing community forums and briefings for state and local policymakers, as well as harnessing the media and providing materials on their website.<sup>56</sup>

Other organizations, such as the Alabama Appleseed Center for Law and Justice, use a strategy focused on changing public perceptions of immigrants. The group, in partnership with Welcoming America, put up 25 billboards in 11 cities around the state emphasizing a welcome for every resident in the community, including immigrants, as a way to encourage residents to connect to the values of inclusiveness and hospitality they already hold. The Welcoming Alabama campaign continues in multiple sites throughout Alabama, focusing not just on paid media, but also on intergroup dialogue.<sup>57</sup>

In Tennessee, renowned documentary filmmaker Kim Snyder produced “Welcome to Shelbyville” in collaboration with the Because Foundation and Active Voice. The film features the efforts of Welcoming Tennessee—a project of the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition and the model for all sub-



A bus bench ad created by the Welcoming Idaho Initiative is mounted on a bench in Boise, Idaho.

WELCOMING IDAHO INITIATIVE

sequent Welcoming America campaigns—as its local partners in Shelbyville work to unite a community dealing with rapid demographic change.<sup>58</sup> The film aired on PBS in May of 2011, and it has been used in communities across the country as a way to bring immigrants and native-born residents together to talk about the issues raised by immigration.<sup>59</sup>

Other groups work proactively with their local media to help educate the press about integration efforts and the positive contributions of newcomers in the community. They focus on approaches such as generating positive news stories and letter to the editor campaigns.<sup>60</sup>

It is particularly important to reframe the debate related to Muslim immigrants. Anti-Muslim sentiment reached a crescendo after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. As native-born residents began to see Middle Eastern immigrants as potential terrorists—leading up to a series of tragic murders of people who looked like they could potentially be Muslims including Sikh immigrant Balbir Singh Sodhi at his gas station in Mesa, Arizona—the Arab American Association of New York worked to counter the misinformed views of many in the area.<sup>61</sup>

Linda Sarsour of the association explains that the group began a number of programs, including the “Speaking Across Differences” project, which “brought together a diverse group of neighbors to speak about issues affecting the community.” They also created a “Coffee and Conversation” program that connected older residents with younger new immigrants to practice English and form lasting bonds.

“The Arab American Association of New York is now looked upon as an ally and a conduit to [the Muslim American] community” after years of these efforts, according to Sarsour.<sup>62</sup>

# Challenges to receiving communities

A variety of actors, including voluntary nonprofit organizations, business groups, and local governments have implemented the four approaches discussed above. The approaches are often piecemeal, taking place neighborhood by neighborhood in response to demographic changes and new arrivals. These local responses point to effective strategies to engage native-born and immigrant residents in speeding the process of immigrant integration.

But there are two challenges to successfully implementing integration programs on a broader scale. Decision makers have to ask themselves about *program assessment* (“How do we know programs work as advertised?”) and about *scaling up* (“How do we implement successful programs more widely?”)

Here we review these issues in more detail.

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## Program assessment

Local and national actors still have only an incomplete notion of which programs actually work and why or what lessons might be transferable elsewhere even though there has been a flowering of local, state, and sometimes federal approaches to immigrant integration and a coalescing around best practices.<sup>63</sup> The coalitions of local actors addressing their community’s response to immigration rarely have the time, expertise, or funding to carry out studies evaluating the programs they have put in place. Funders, for their part, place a greater emphasis on getting programs in place than in assessing how well they accomplish their stated mission.

It is true that properly designed evaluation programs—which assess which changes can be directly attributed to a particular intervention, like a program or policy—can require additional resources and that the results of the evaluation, if negative, might be seen as embarrassing. The costs of program assessment, however, can be kept to a minimum if evaluation is built into the design of the project

from the beginning. Evaluations also can increase confidence that successes can be replicated elsewhere and that funders' money is being well spent.<sup>64</sup>

What is required is the development of what researchers in other contexts call a “culture of evaluation,” in which program evaluation is the norm rather than the exception.<sup>65</sup> Once decision makers have indicators for what works they may be able to decide which programs to replicate elsewhere.

Welcoming America provides a good model to assess program participants. In each of their receiving community dialogues they provide surveys at the beginning and the end to try to measure how much the attitudes of native and newcomer have changed as a result of the session. The surveys ask respondents to rate their sense of agreement with questions such as “I would / I do feel comfortable having immigrants live on my street,” “Immigrants make our community less safe,” or “Immigrants in the community respect the laws and law enforcement.” Welcoming America can gauge and quantify just how much attitudes have shifted by providing these surveys before and after the dialogues.<sup>66</sup>

## Program assessment: Welcoming America

Welcoming America has been at the forefront of developing a new approach to integration since 2004. Rather than focusing solely on immigrant behavior, Welcoming America turns its attention to the communities that receive them and to understanding and evaluating how best to structure immigrant and native-born interactions.

Welcoming America Executive Director David Lubell first gained an understanding of the importance of receiving communities as founder of the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition. TIRRC focused on immigrant integration through statewide policy and legislative engagement, but when Lubell heard about a project called Welcoming Iowa, which sought to engage native Iowans in immigrant integration, he says, “I realized that we needed to be doing something to reach out to everyday Tennesseans.” This realization led to the creation of Welcoming Tennessee in 2006.

Since 2006, Lubell has turned these individual state campaigns into a national umbrella group coordinating “Welcoming” affiliates in 14 states. Welcoming campaigns tend to have two essential components: spreading positive messages about immigrants and fostering direct contact between immigrants and native-born community members.

Welcoming America prides itself on evaluating its programming. Before and after each of its community dialogues it gives out a survey to its participants to gauge how their reactions toward immigrants and natives might have changed after the event.

Welcoming America is also at work, with the Barr Foundation of Boston, on a set of metrics that will allow them to systematically study the impact of their programming. They have put together a set of 20 indicators of success, split between short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes. The indicators range from the more immediate “increased number of supportive US-born immigrant allies engaged in Welcoming campaigns,” to the long-term “Immigrants are more likely to interact with the general population and more involved civically in their community.” Each indicator consists of a variable to be measured (public opinion, for example), how to measure it (changes in public opinion, for example) and a proposed data source for the evaluation.

These metrics provide a holistic way to track the organization's successes as well as shifts in the larger community dialogue.

It is critical that organizations assessing the effects on the larger community do not resort to binary judgments such as whether or not they are able to stop anti-immigrant legislation. In many cases simply creating an effective mobilization of the community or keeping the harshest parts of anti-immigrant legislation from passing can and should be considered a victory.

The Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition and Welcoming America, for example, have over the last decade built up robust partnerships among business leaders, nonprofits, religious organizations, local governmental actors, and immigrant groups.<sup>67</sup> They can point to the mobilization of these partnerships—unsuccessfully to stave off attempts to change Tennessee’s driver’s license laws and then successfully to defeat an English-only referendum in Nashville in 2009—as evidence of organizational success. Welcoming America also points to the passage of welcoming resolutions in a number of cities and towns across three states as evidence of local communities’ shifts toward positive stances toward immigrant integration.<sup>68</sup>

In any case, tangible outcomes signal real strengths in local efforts to integrate immigrants but are still not the kind of assessments that allow other actors to really get at what works and what experiences might be transferable to other places.

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These metrics provide a holistic way to track the organization’s successes as well as shifts in the larger community dialogue.

Welcoming America is just one organization, and the goal must be to ensure that all organizations focused on receiving communities and integration develop and use similar metrics and evaluations to track their programs.<sup>69</sup>

In many cases simply creating an effective mobilization of the community or keeping the harshest parts of anti-immigrant legislation from passing can and should be considered a victory.

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## Scaling up

The issues addressed in this report—how to respond to the anxieties of the native born and tackle the integration of new immigrant arrivals—are experienced locally but are national in scope. So while localities around the country struggle with similar anxieties about how to integrate immigrants, solutions tend to be arrived at community by community. This is why programs for immigrant integration have until recently almost all been local. The shift from a single local arena across various localities and states is still largely uncharted territory.

The question is how these local experiences can lead to broader solutions for communities across the country. Local programs do not transfer automatically, and they are influenced by local factors. But there must be some mechanism in place to allow for experiences to be replicated or adapted successfully in other places—particularly if they are being implemented on a larger scale.

Welcoming America comes closest to implementing an approach that allows local coalitions to learn and borrow from the experiences of partnerships working in other localities. It is a possible model for other organizations.

Welcoming America is less of an organization than a national collaboration, with affiliates in 17 states, each working with one or more communities.<sup>70</sup> It provides a set of organizing tools for networking, training, fundraising, and media relations to its affiliates through its website and annual meetings as well as a shared intranet and forum for regular contact and feedback among its affiliates through its monthly conference calls.<sup>71</sup>

Affiliation in this loose coalition of organizations is primarily about the trading of expertise and information on program effectiveness and implementation among a group of like-minded groups focused on preparing communities to tackle immigrant integration.

The model Welcoming America offers is a forum allowing successful local strategies to be replicated effectively from place to place—not by offering a single template but rather by setting out an organizational toolkit from which affiliates can choose.

As localities across the country look for ways to respond to the changes taking place as the result of immigration to their communities they will seek to learn

from experiences taking place elsewhere, and this will likely lead to a “scaling up” of programs to address local anxieties and immigrant integration. One path to pursue this is the networked affiliate model Welcoming America successfully pioneered. But local actors also may turn to federated organizational styles in use by groups such as the NAACP or fraternal organizations such as the Elks.<sup>72</sup> Additionally, venues such as the National Immigrant Integration Conferences, begun in 2008, bring together many of the national, state, and local policy actors working on immigrant integration. They are another way for cross-pollination and learning across approaches.<sup>73</sup>

Whatever the model followed, the scaling up of local initiatives will require the backing and support of state and national organizations and funders.

# Policy recommendations

Immigration will continue at high levels into the foreseeable future, and most foreign-born residents will continue to settle as co-workers and neighbors in communities around the United States. So what can decision makers in government, philanthropy, and civil society do to facilitate their integration? And what can policymakers in government, philanthropy, and civil society do to prepare native-born residents for the demographic transition already taking place or about to take place in their hometowns? Here we offer some recommendations for government and nongovernment actors.

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## What the federal government can do

Efforts toward comprehensive immigration reform have sputtered out since 2007. But immigrant integration is one area in which the federal government must play a major role—with or without reform.

The federal government—and in particular the Departments of Homeland Security and Health and Human Services—could take significant steps to facilitate the transition immigrants and their receiving communities are currently undergoing without waiting for full-scale reform of U.S. immigration policy.

We believe that all federal integration programs and policy should take receiving communities into account. Many federal programs—funding adult literacy, educating children, providing information on naturalization, and easing refugees into the job market—help integrate immigrants into American society. But few of these programs address integration directly, and almost none address the anxieties of receiving communities or try to engage residents in the longer-term process of immigrant integration.<sup>74</sup>

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services in the Department of Homeland Security is responsible for facilitating the naturalization of immigrants to the United States. While one of the agency's goals is to “support immigrants’ integra-

tion and participation in American civic culture” this (DHS) objective has generally received short shrift.<sup>75</sup> Only a tiny fraction of the agency’s total budget—\$19.7 million or one-tenth of a percent of USCIS funding—is directly budgeted for immigrant integration programs such as naturalization, civics, and language classes. Only \$8.5 million goes to citizenship and integration grant programs.<sup>76</sup>

One thing the federal government could do, then, is allocate more money for integration but direct it specifically to groups working with receiving communities to encourage positive interactions between natives and newcomers.

Increasing this commitment would allow USCIS to partner with states and localities to foster immigrant integration. It would match state and local funding with support from USCIS, allowing states and localities to design their own integration programs, whether publicly funded or in partnership with local nongovernmental organizations, and working with communities to engage long-term residents in the integration of new immigrants.<sup>77</sup>

The Department of Health and Human Services’s Office of Refugee Resettlement piloted an integration program of this sort from 2001 to 2004 titled “Building the New American Community.” It worked with local communities to facilitate the integration of refugees in Lowell, Massachusetts; Nashville, Tennessee; and Portland, Oregon.<sup>78</sup> But again, this pilot project—which received \$5 million in funding over five years—represented only a small fraction of the more than \$800 million a year in refugee resettlement programming disbursed by HHS and programs aimed explicitly at receiving communities are absent in the current budget.<sup>79</sup>

Additionally, the Department of Education funds approximately \$75 million for English language and civics learning. That is a significant amount, but it still only comes to about \$2 per foreign-born resident in the United States.<sup>80</sup>

HHS, DHS, and the Department of Education should expand funding for their programs, working with partners in immigrant-receiving communities to engage residents to help integrate new immigrant arrivals.

In addition, resources could be allocated more effectively if integration efforts were coordinated across federal agencies. The Migration Policy Institute and others have called for the creation of a White House Office of Immigrant Integration, which would coordinate across the federal government, resolve conflicts between agencies, and create a strategic plan to foster immigrant integration. We believe that such a plan is appropriate and timely.<sup>81</sup>

Only a tiny fraction of the agency’s total budget is directly budgeted for immigrant integration programs such as naturalization, civics, and language classes.

Finally, a focus on receiving communities should be written into federal refugee resettlement grants. Voluntary agencies charged with resettling refugees often spend most of their resources on integration—English language acquisition or job training, for example—while little or nothing is done to prepare receiving communities for the new arrivals. Voluntary agencies are already stretched too thinly when it comes to the number of programs they can undertake with limited funding. Building increased funding for receiving communities work into all new resettlement contracts would go a long way toward shifting the paradigm.<sup>82</sup>

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### What state and local government can do

Much of the action on immigration is taking place in states and localities. But these policies are overwhelmingly reactive rather than looking into the future to the task of building a community among new and old residents, immigrants, and native born.

A number of states—among them California, Illinois, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, and Washington—have active state offices for immigrant affairs, as do many major cities such as New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. These offices work with immigrant organizations and receiving communities. But with the economic downturn after 2008, and the severe budgetary pressures the states are facing, even states most supportive of programs directed at immigration are considering scaling back their commitments.

The demographic changes taking place and the need to focus efforts on relations between immigrant and native-born residents mean that states and localities should expand funding efforts at immigrant integration—including support for nongovernmental community-building efforts, publicly subsidized English language classes, and in-state tuition—even with state and local resources stretched thin. They should treat these as investments in their states’ longer-term social and economic well-being.

As on the federal level, state and local governments can insist that providers operating under their aegis write receiving communities programs into their service agreements. Our report illustrates that integration work is a critical part of the immigrant experience, but a focus on receiving communities must be thought of as a key integration strategy.

Our report illustrates that integration work is a critical part of the immigrant experience, but a focus on receiving communities must be thought of as a key integration strategy.

Policymakers at all levels of government can work to foster a more inclusive environment for these programs by facilitating their usage and helping to fund their operations.

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### What nongovernmental organizations can do

Nongovernmental actors have long been significant players in providing services and aid to immigrant communities. With the rising backlash against immigrants at the local and state level in the United States, some localities now recognize that they need to take a broader approach to immigrant integration by involving native-born residents as much as the foreign born.

This perspective on immigrant integration is still new, though, and often the organizational infrastructure that localities have built—both for addressing the needs of the native born as well as the requirements of immigrant newcomers—needs to reorient itself to the new challenge.

NGOs must realize that they need the support of the native community for integration to be successful instead of simply reaching out to their base of immigrants and immigrant supporters. This cultural shift can seem counterintuitive, and it may run counter to funding and constitutional mandates. Nevertheless, a focus on receiving communities will lay the groundwork for success, and it ultimately will make all other parts of the resettlement and integration efforts easier.

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### What funders can do

Many funders are generous contributors to programs seeking to build immigrant organizations' capacity and to address immigration policy. But they tend to leave out addressing native-born anxieties about immigration.<sup>83</sup> The attitudes of the native born shape the terrain of immigrant integration.

We have explained that building successful communities of immigrant newcomers and older residents requires involving both sets of actors. Providing for successful integration programs requires a rigorous assessment of what is working and what is not. And scaling up local efforts to apply across cities and states around the country facing similar issues requires a different set of organizational models.

With the rising backlash against immigrants, some localities now recognize that they need to take a broader approach to immigrant integration by involving native-born residents as much as the foreign born.

Funders can help provide the resources to bring newcomers and older residents together, evaluate which programs are most promising, and support the organizational models needed to implement successful local innovations on a broader scale. The work of receiving communities is still in its nascent stages. We hope this report will encourage other funders to expand on and disseminate these approaches.

Corporate sponsors should also recognize the value that a focus on immigrant integration through receiving communities can have. Governmental and non-governmental organizations can only do so much, and business owners are often leaders in their community, which gives them significant leverage to jump-start receiving communities work. These sponsors also have a strong financial incentive to create harmony between immigrants and newcomers, and to make sure that all residents are benefiting economically and consuming local goods and services.

# Conclusion

Immigrants have come to the United States and become Americans for as long as the United States has been a country. The process of “becoming American,” however, is largely left to immigrants themselves. The anxieties of longer-term residents in receiving communities have received little attention as well.

This report proposes that engaging the native born in immigrant integration results in a better outcome for both newly arrived immigrants and their citizen children, as well as for the residents of the communities in which they reside. Bringing new and old residents together around a set of common interests and the common task of immigrant integration shows promise in making the foreign born a part of the larger American society and assuaging tensions between newcomers and longer-term residents.

While deciding who is allowed to pass through our borders is a matter of national policy, the process of integration is at root profoundly local, and it is what receiving communities do—developing leadership, fostering contact between immigrants and other residents, engaging public and private actors to work together in coalitions, and reframing debates to highlight the importance of immigrant integration—that makes immigrant integration work smoothly and well.

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## About the author

Michael Jones-Correa is professor of government at Cornell University. He is a co-author of Latinos in the New Millennium (Cambridge, 2012) and Latino Lives in America: Making It Home (Temple, 2010), the author of Between Two Nations: The Political Predicament of Latinos in New York City (Cornell, 1998), the editor of Governing American Cities: Inter-Ethnic Coalitions, Competition and Conflict (Russell Sage Foundation, 2001), a co-PI for the 2006 Latino National Survey, as well as the author of more than two dozen articles and chapters on immigration, race, ethnicity and citizenship in the United States.

Jones-Correa has been a visiting fellow at the Russell Sage Foundation, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and the Center for the Study of Democratic Politics at Princeton University, and he is the team leader for the 2010-2013 theme project “Immigration: Settlement, Immigration and Membership,” at the Institute for the Social Sciences at Cornell.

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**Cover photo:** Students at South Ocean Middle School in Patchogue, New York, gather in front of the school to view an exhibit of “Embracing Our Differences” banners.

# Appendix A: List of participants at the first meeting of the Receiving Communities Initiative

**December 14-15, 2010**

**Center for American Progress**

**Washington D.C.**

**Carol Bass**

Prince William County Public Schools

**Michael Byun**

Asian Services In Action of Ohio

**Vanessa Cardenas**

Center for American Progress

**Rebecca Carson**

Office of Citizenship, Department of Homeland Security

**Jeff Carter**

Manassas Church of the Brethren

**Nancy Chang**

Open Society Institute

**Aixa Cintron-Velez**

Russell Sage Foundation

**Katharine Donato**

Vanderbilt University

**Victoria Esses**

University of Western Ontario

**Felicia Escobar**

White House Domestic Policy Council

**Marshall Fitz**

Center for American Progress

**Ellen Gallagher**

Welcoming America

**Ricardo Gambetta**

National League of Cities

**Ann Garcia**

Center for American Progress

**Shruti Garg**

Open Society Institute

**Laurent F. Gilbert**

City of Lewiston, Maine

**Andrew Grant-Thomas**

Kirwan Institute, Ohio State University

**Taryn Higashi**

Unbound Philanthropy

**Dan Hopkins**

Georgetown University

**Adam Hunter**

Office of Citizenship, Department of Homeland Security

**Michael Jones-Correa**

Cornell University

**Dave Joseph**

Public Conversations Project

**Susan Downs Karkos**

Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning

**Angela M. Kelley**

Center for American Progress

**Stephanie Kenyon**

Loudoun Community Health Center

**Eliza Leighton**

Casa de Maryland

**David Lubell**

Welcoming America

## Appendix A (Continued)

**Clarissa Martinez**

National Council of La Raza

**Gebe Martinez**

Formerly of the Center for American Progress

**Suzette Brooks Masters**

J.M. Kaplan Fund

**Margie McHugh**

Migration Policy Institute

**John Mollenkopf**

City University of New York

**Dowell Myers**

University of Southern California

**Anne O'Callaghan**

Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians

**Patrice O'Neill**

Not in Our Town

**Manuel Pastor**

University of Southern California

**Laura Patching**

Office of Citizenship, Department of Homeland Security

**Karthick Ramakrishnan**

University of California Riverside

**Jeremy Robbins**

New York City, Office of the Mayor

**Archana Sahgal**

Open Society Institute

**Linda Sarsour**

National Network for Arab American Communities

**Audrey Singer**

Brookings Institution

**Cookie Stephan**

Formerly of the New Mexico State University

**Walter Stephan**

Formerly of the New Mexico State University

**J. Walter Tejada**

County Board Member, Arlington, Virginia

**Lisa Thakkar**

Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

**Susan Thornton**

Littleton Immigrant Integration Initiative

**Dan Tichenor**

University of Oregon

**Darcy Tromanhauser**

Nebraska Appleseed

**Eric Ward**

Formerly of the Center for New Community

**Kim Williams**

Harvard University

**Jamie Winders**

Syracuse University

**Joe Wismann-Horther**

Formerly of Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning

**Cara Wong**

University of Illinois

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- 56 Iowa Immigration Education Coalition.
- 57 Immigration Policy Project, Alabama Appleseed, available at [http://www.alabamaappleseed.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=46&Itemid=58](http://www.alabamaappleseed.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=46&Itemid=58); A similar organization affiliated with Welcoming America implemented a similar strategy: Nebraska Appleseed, available at <http://neappleseed.org/>.
- 58 Welcoming Tennessee, available at <http://www.tnimmigrant.org/welcoming-tennessee-initiative/>; "Welcome to Shelbyville," available at <http://welcometoshelbyvillefilm.com/>.
- 59 The film's online resources are available at Shelbyville Multimedia, available at <http://www.shelbyvillemultimedia.org/>; and Welcome to Shelbyville, available at <http://www.itvs.org/films/welcome-to-shelbyville/engagement-resources>.
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- 69 Barr Foundation, "Welcoming America Indicators, Draft," September 16, 2010. Provided to author.
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- 74 On refugee resettlement, for instance, see the issues raised by the Lugar report on the failures of the Office of Refugee Resettlement to prepare receiving communities for influxes of refugees. <http://lugar.senate.gov/issues/foreign/refugee/>.
- 75 The Obama administration's proposed 2012 budget requests \$2 billion for detention beds, \$527.6 million for border fencing, infrastructure, and technology, and \$184 million for Secure Communities. Overall, the Customs and Border Protection, or CBP, is budgeted for \$11.8 billion in 2012 and the Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, budget at \$5.8 billion. Immigration Policy Center, "Restrictionist Group Blames the Children of Immigrants for America's Budget Woes" (2011), available at <http://immigrationimpact.com/2011/04/05/restrictionist-group-blames-the-children-of-immigrants-for-america%E2%80%99s-budget-woes/>.
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- 77 Personal communication with Adam Hunter, program manager, Office of Citizenship, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, U.S. Department of Homeland Security.
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- 82 Helping NGO's engage with the public is consistent with the recommendations of the 2010 report to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations from Sen. Richard Lugar (R-IN) on refugee resettlement, and we believe that making this type of engagement is critical to a successful integration process. Sen. Richard Lugar, "Abandoned Upon Arrival: Implications for Refugees and Local Communities Burdened By a U.S. Resettlement System that is Not Working," Report to the Members of the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, July 21, 2010, p. 6-7.
- 83 See the extensive work conducted by Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees: GCIR Reports (by Title), available at <http://www.gcir.org/publications/gcir>.

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