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# THE **RECEIVING COMMUNITIES** TOOLKIT:

*A Guide For Engaging Mainstream America In Immigrant Integration*

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*A Project of Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning and Welcoming America*



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**DEAR READER,**

It is with great anticipation that we release the Receiving Communities Toolkit, a guide to engaging mainstream America in integrating newcomers into our communities. We believe that just as fertile soil is needed for a seed to grow, receptive communities are critical if immigrants are to thrive.

The Receiving Communities Toolkit focuses on communities where new immigrants have made their homes, helping neighbors build relationships through trust and understanding. While others may concentrate on the seed, the toolkit's emphasis is on preparing the soil in which it will flourish.

The toolkit draws upon and highlights a growing body of promising yet often little-known efforts that successfully bridge divides between immigrants and longer-term residents in receiving communities across the country, the communities where newcomers settle. These efforts build meaningful connections between immigrants and the native born through contact, improved communication and leadership in order to foster stronger and more unified communities.

The toolkit is illustrative, not comprehensive. The examples it showcases reflect a variety of approaches that have been used successfully in specific situations and locations. It aims to provide practitioners with concrete examples, practical advice and new ideas to prompt ongoing reflection and spur action.

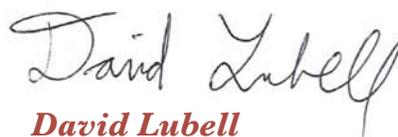
We hope the toolkit promotes the growth of a robust receiving communities movement that unites people across racial, ethnic, religious and gender lines, a precondition, we believe, to true immigrant integration. We hope you will be inspired to join a growing network of individuals, organizations and communities working together to strengthen our social fabric. You can begin by visiting and sharing your own successes on the Receiving Communities website at [www.receivingcommunities.org](http://www.receivingcommunities.org).

We invite you to participate in this journey with us.

**SINCERELY,**



***Susan Downs-Karkos***  
**Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning**



***David Lubell***  
**Welcoming America**



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# INTRODUCTION

The demographic changes that have swept cities and towns across the United States are well documented. Over the past 15 years, immigration rates to the United States have reached levels unmatched since the early 1900s. While in 1990 one in 12 Americans was an immigrant, by 2005 that ratio had risen to one in eight. And today, immigrants are more likely to make their homes in cities and towns without a history of immigration, such as Nashville, Boise, and Omaha, increasing the risk of misunderstanding, fear and divisions within these communities. Change on this scale is never easy, neither for immigrants nor for the communities into which they settle, referred to as “receiving communities.”

There are stories behind these numbers: stories of immigrants and refugees making their homes in new communities, and stories of longer-term members of these immigrant-receiving communities, who are witnessing and experiencing both subtle and significant changes to their neighborhoods and their lives. Frankly, many receiving communities members have mixed feelings about these changes. While newcomers may spur community revitalization through population growth, new economic opportunities, and exotic cuisines and cultures, receiving community members may feel uncomfortable in the face of their linguistic, cultural and religious distinctiveness. Changes to a familiar landscape may be deeply unsettling for community members who liked things “the way they were.”

Throughout its history, America’s demographic composition has fluctuated as waves of newcomers from abroad, or from other states, entered communities. The migration drivers remain the same after 300 years: economic opportunity, family reunification, safety and freedom. Although migratory trends are nothing new for people living in traditional immigrant gateways such as New York City, Chicago or Southern Florida, demographic change may prove difficult for those who personally feel its impacts or are encountering a new cultural group for the first time.

While some receiving communities members strongly support immigrant and refugee families, others do not, and their ambivalence can escalate to anxiety and outright hostility. Even in the face of ambivalence or hostility however, it is possible to minimize tension between immigrants and longer-term residents and nurture positive relationships. Practitioners actively advancing immigrant integration, by promoting welcoming communities and bridging racial divides, are using a set of strategies to effectively engage receiving communities members. These three promising approaches include: strengthening meaningful contact between newcomers and receiving communities members; developing communication strategies that emphasize the positive aspects of a united and diverse community; and encouraging the participation of mainstream leaders in efforts that build community among diverse populations.

In recent decades, a growing number of grassroots community organizers, service providers, policymakers and civic leaders have worked diligently to promote the long-term integration of immigrants in their communities. They have typically engaged in grassroots organizing to strengthen the voice of immigrant communities; provided services to immigrants to help them learn English, naturalize and participate in the workforce, for example; and fought for public policies that promote immigrant integration. Yet few efforts have used strategies to engage the other half of the immigrant integration equation: the receiving communities members, and, in particular, the estimated 60% of Americans who have a mixed view of immigrants. Integration is next to impossible if such a large portion of the population fails to accept immigrants.

This toolkit is designed for practitioners interested in creating more welcoming, cohesive communities across the nation and in their own backyards. It is for those who want to incorporate promising strategies for engaging receiving communities members in order to build broader support for immigrants among mainstream America. While the toolkit does not catalog every effort to engage community, it provides the reader with links to particularly promising approaches and significant lessons learned from a variety of key informants who have worked in each strategy area.

In many ways the receiving communities approach outlined in the toolkit is about fostering collaboration between immigrants and longer-term residents to reshape the boundaries of “us” and “them.” The strategies described do not purport to be the only approaches for addressing long-term challenges related to immigration or immigrant integration, or to supersede traditional methods and approaches. Certainly there remains a need for activists across the political spectrum to push ongoing immigration-related policy debates around the edges, far beyond the comfort zone of the typical receiving communities collaboration. For it is only through this democracy-in-action that strong public policies will be developed that benefit both immigrants and receiving community members. At the same time, it is more important than ever to counter a larger narrative that has instilled fear among many Americans about changing demographics and weakened the social fabric by demonizing immigrants and negating their contributions. Tackling the challenge of engaging receiving communities members is critical, and a new vocabulary and approach are needed to begin these difficult conversations, develop new relationships, and create real listening and understanding. For those who remain deeply committed to the wellbeing of immigrants, there is a place for both traditional and receiving communities approaches. Against the backdrop of increased polarization, using both approaches may be the only way to usher in lasting cultural change beneficial for immigrants and their neighbors alike.

## TOOLKIT BACKGROUND AND FRAMEWORK

**The toolkit is organized around three key strategy areas, which taken together, suggest tremendous potential for improving the community climate. Strategy areas include:**

In December 2010, Welcoming America, the Center for American Progress (CAP) and the J.M. Kaplan Fund hosted a convening to jumpstart a conversation about engaging receiving communities members in immigrant integration efforts. This two-day event brought together academics and practitioners to discuss how best to engage mainstream Americans to promote inclusion and ease conflict, drawing upon both academic research and real-life experience. Understanding what causes community tensions and why some locations struggle more than others were central to the discussion. Proceedings from the convening and recommendations for further action were compiled by Dr. Michael Jones-Correa and released by CAP in September 2011 as *All Immigration is Local: Receiving Communities and Their Role in Successful Immigrant Integration*. The report is available at <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2011/09/rci.html>.

The *Receiving Communities Toolkit* is designed to complement the CAP report by offering a more granular look at on-the-ground strategies for practitioners seeking to appeal to ambivalent community members. The toolkit content is based on interviews with 61 stakeholders who have successfully employed various receiving communities approaches in their work. Telephone interviews were conducted between March and September 2011. Interviewees generously shared information, provided referrals to others working in this field, and offered valuable insights on how to engage receiving communities most effectively.

**Contact.** Many immigrants and longer-term residents have limited meaningful contact with each other. While they may live in the same cities or towns, their lives may not intersect in significant ways in the workplace, in schools, or in their neighborhoods. Among other factors, language and cultural barriers may contribute to an environment in which both immigrants and longer-term residents feel some level of discomfort with each other. Methods for bringing community members together to promote meaningful contact are critical to build the foundation for a more welcoming community. The toolkit describes strategies such as dialogue and joint community projects to help community members develop relationships across racial, ethnic and linguistic lines and reach audiences beyond the “choir.”

**Communications.** Media can be a positive or negative force impacting immigrant integration locally. Examples of successful media campaigns provide ideas for how communication strategies can be tailored to the local context and used for best advantage. There is fresh, provocative thinking about the types of messages that resonate with receiving communities and the kinds of individuals who make effective spokespeople. Taken together, media and communications can reinforce contact and leadership building strategies and counter resistant public opinion.

**Leadership.** The involvement of receiving communities leaders in integration and unity efforts sends powerful signals to others in the community that changing demographics bring opportunity, not only challenge, and should not be feared. In this section, interviews with mainstream leaders and the people who support them demystify how such leaders emerge and identify how to keep them engaged. This toolkit chapter outlines how practitioners can identify potential allies, successfully work with and support them, and encourage them to play a growing role in community integration.



## *How to Use the Toolkit*

The toolkit is designed to be an easy reference guide for those interested in strengthening contact, communication and leadership engagement practices. Chapters contain the following:

- An overview of the strategy and why it is important.
- Key issues for consideration before implementing the strategy.
- A sample of available resources, including suggestions for where to start and where else to look.
- An analysis of the opportunities and challenges presented by the approach.

Readers of the toolkit are encouraged to reflect upon the specific community context in their hometowns in determining which approaches seem most relevant and most feasible. Personal and organizational capacity and financial constraints are also important considerations to bear in mind in adapting specific strategies and tools.

Throughout the toolkit, experts from the field weigh in with their own experiences, lessons learned and recommendations for receiving communities work. The toolkit concludes with advice on launching local comprehensive efforts and next steps for building an inclusive receiving communities movement.

Because this is a dynamic field, resources from receiving communities work will continue to be updated on the receiving communities website, which can be accessed at [www.welcomingamerica.org/resources/rci](http://www.welcomingamerica.org/resources/rci).



In too many cities and towns across the country, immigrants and mainstream Americans have little significant interaction with each other. Language barriers make it difficult for people to communicate beyond a few simple greetings. Cultural differences – such as not making eye contact or a hesitancy to smile – may inadvertently create the misperception that some immigrant groups are aloof or unapproachable. At the same time, many receiving communities members may be uncomfortable with the transformation underway in their hometowns and hesitate to accept, much less embrace, demographic change. Their lack of real connection with newcomers only exacerbates their concerns and fears.

Once people begin to develop ambivalence, distrust, and perhaps even hostility towards each other, how can more positive, meaningful connections be established? The answer is deceptively simple. When people have the opportunity to connect with one another on an individual level and recognize their common humanity, differences diminish, and the differences that remain may seem interesting rather than threatening. Intergroup contact theory research from the social psychology field suggests that interpersonal contact reduces misperceptions by helping people understand and appreciate viewpoints different from their own. By working towards common goals and establishing a growing familiarity with each other, bonds are strengthened and misunderstanding reduced.

## 1. TRADITIONAL METHODS

For many years the standard practice for those working in the immigrant integration field was to rely on facts to help community members learn about immigrants. Says Darcy Tromanhauser of Nebraska Appleseed, “We began making presentations around the state armed with data about the contributions immigrants make to the economy, the fact that immigrants create jobs for the U.S. born, and the rates at which they learn English. After awhile, though, we worried that facts alone were insufficient. We began looking for creative ways to begin from a stronger, values-based perspective and also to build in opportunities for audiences to get to know immigrants personally.”

Critics of information sessions that rely solely on facts have argued that the sessions are not neutral but designed to promote the presenter’s point of view. Research presented may be selective and inconvenient facts ignored. In short, these presentations often fail to convince skeptical audiences.

As it became clear that facts alone were insufficient to change the hearts and minds of the ambivalent, practitioners increasingly turned to immigrant stories as an education tool. Immigrants shared their own experiences of trying to become part of the community. These presentations attempted to help the audience develop a sense of empathy for and connection

with the immigrant speaker. While practitioners preferred this approach to facts and statistics, they worried that the impact might be short-lived or that the empathy might be limited to the particular immigrant presenter.

Bringing together the community through festivals and cultural celebrations has traditionally been another popular strategy. These are typically positive, “feel good” events, but they tend to attract supporters rather than those who are “on the fence.” In smaller communities or communities with little experience of diversity, cultural events may be particularly valuable and symbolic, and they may be the right place to start if there is very little existing contact between immigrants and the native born. However, their ability to help people change their perceptions about each other is debatable. Although they build community awareness of newcomer groups and validate the ethnicity being celebrated, there are more effective models to engage receiving communities members.

Another common method to build empathy and connection to the immigrant story is through cultural exchange programs. These are appealing because they provide participants an opportunity to learn more about the conditions that prompt migration and to experience the lives of migrants in their home countries. Programs like these give participants the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the context from which people come and may even provide opportunities to meet those planning to emigrate or families who have been left behind. They may also lead to follow up action upon the participant’s return home. The **Center for International Understanding** at the University of North Carolina provides opportunities for North Carolina leaders to develop a greater understanding of immigration through its Latino Initiative, which has brought 700 people to Mexico since 1998. Teams visit Mexico together and return to North Carolina inspired to launch new activities that address immigrant integration. Visit [www.ciu.northcarolina.edu](http://www.ciu.northcarolina.edu) to learn more.

### *Ways to Strengthen Traditional Approaches:*

- **Rather than simply hosting a stand-alone community event, most practitioners now incorporate discussion into community activities, discussion that features a range of perspectives and personal observations to avoid the polarization that usually results from traditional immigration debates.**
- **Personalize the event by including stories from immigrants as well as those from receiving communities.**
- **Utilize arts and culture to deepen empathy and build awareness of the issues surrounding demographic change.**

Currently, a wealth of community experimentation is underway to foster meaningful contact between immigrants and longer-term members beyond the methods just described. From Colorado to California, from Minnesota to North Carolina, many grassroots efforts intentionally bridge the gulf between immigrants and receiving communities. These newer approaches tend to fall into two distinct categories: community dialogues and joint projects.

## 2. COMMUNITY DIALOGUES

Dialogues are an increasingly popular approach for engaging receiving communities. In a supportive and safe environment, participants have a platform for expressing their opinions, including their concerns and fears. Dialogue is seen as an important avenue for drawing the unsure out. Numerous resources have been developed to help community members use dialogue to bring those with different opinions together, understand each other's points of view, and reflect on their own perceptions.

### Dialogue Resources

#### Getting Started

The **Public Conversations Project/Welcoming America** tool is arguably the best place to start when looking at different dialogue resources because it has been designed specifically for engaging receiving communities members.

Public Conversations Project's (PCP) dialogue methodology helps practitioners bring together diverse community members to understand the experiences of people with different identities, values and world views; reflect on their own life experiences, values, perceptions and assumptions; develop genuine curiosity about other participants' lives and perspectives; and move beyond stereotypes to see the rich complexity and humanity of others.

PCP's model ranges from single two-hour sessions to help people explore topics of interest, to ongoing processes that can last for a year. Dialogues are crafted to fit the local context depending on the issue and level of tension. The goal is to deepen trust by having people truly listen to one another and have their shared humanity displace stereotypes based on fear and ignorance. While dialogue may not lead to agreement nor unearth a solution to a particular problem, the process models ways to work together on areas of common concern and develop greater personal connections.

## Issues to Consider for Successful Dialogues

- **Existing dialogue tools, described on the following page, should be adapted to address the target audience's unique context. Some tools are designed for a single dialogue session, while others are for much longer, multi-session processes. Consider the appropriate time commitment for the target audience and tailor goals to those that can be realistically achieved with the length of the chosen dialogue process.**
- **Since planning for dialogues is time-consuming, find specific staff or volunteers who will dedicate a significant portion of time to planning and following up with the event.**
- **Identify a neutral, trained and experienced facilitator for the dialogues who is not perceived to have a personal or professional agenda regarding the issue at hand.**
- **Enlist one or more community partners who have relationships with the target receiving community members to specifically reach out to them to attend the events. For example, faith-based organizations appear to be ideal partners and places to recruit receiving communities members of all perspectives.**
- **Create personalized invitations to the dialogues. If possible, have invitations come from individuals that participants know and trust.**
- **Be clear about the purpose and time commitment for the dialogue.**
- **Incorporate pre-meeting, one-on-one or caucus work with smaller groups of people who may be hesitant to participate so that they can explore their feelings in a supportive environment and feel better prepared for a larger group forum.**
- **Create an environment at the dialogue where people feel safe and no one feels exposed.**
- **Make the dialogue a personal experience, not one that feels broad and abstract, since the idea is for the dialogue to develop connections between people.**
- **Be prepared for follow-up and incorporate it into the planning process. Many who have tried one-time dialogues feel they are often insufficient. Dialogues and other contact-building efforts are most effective when they happen more than once. This sustained effort should be planned for in advance.**

Dialogues typically begin by having participants share with the group a story from their own life that relates to the topic of discussion. The facilitator then asks additional questions and has each person address those questions for a few minutes without interruption while the other participants listen to what is said and reflect upon it. Questions are designed to help people articulate their hopes, fears, and concerns. The next step is for participants to ask each other questions to learn more about others' perspectives but not to persuade. The dialogue closes with participant reflections.

The *Fostering Welcoming Communities through Dialogue* tool includes tips from the Public Conversations Project for Welcoming America practitioners. The guide includes details on dialogue planning and preparation, event design, tips for facilitators and follow-up evaluation. The guide is available at [www.welcomingamerica.org/resources/tools](http://www.welcomingamerica.org/resources/tools). Additional materials from the Public Conversations Project can be found at [www.publicconversations.org](http://www.publicconversations.org), including a full guide and virtual workshop.

## Dialogue Tools

**Everyday Democracy** has created a tool called *Changing Faces, Changing Communities: Immigration and Race, Jobs, Schools and Language Differences* for use in dialogues. The format consists of ongoing discussions with small groups of 10-12 people from all walks of life to help them talk about issues of importance, such as jobs, education and social services, and to take action to influence their communities. Detailed information about the guide is available at [www.everyday-democracy.org](http://www.everyday-democracy.org).

Other dialogue models of note include **Civic Reflections**, which uses a work of literature to serve as the central focus of a conversation around immigration and engage participants in moral reasoning. This model is appealing because it is non-threatening, and humanity councils around the country have used Civic Reflections to tackle a variety of issues. More information about the model can be found at [www.civicreflection.org](http://www.civicreflection.org). In addition, **National Issues Forum** is a network of organizations promoting public deliberation. It does not advance a point of view but rather helps people identify the concerns they share and creates an issue-specific discussion guide to help groups come together and engage around a particular issue. Materials related to immigration are available at [www.nifi.org](http://www.nifi.org).

## Examples From the Field

In Nashville, Tennessee, the **Scarritt-Bennett Center** uses dialogues to address three separate but related topics: immigration, racism and religion. The challenge has been ensuring participation by sufficiently diverse actors. The native born who are already sympathetic to immigrants tend to be those who participate, but it is important for immigrants and more skeptical long-term residents to join as well. To engage other receiving communities members, the Center is tapping faith-based institutions. To address Islamophobia, for instance, they build relationships with churches. Through an interfaith dialogue process, they now have synagogue, church and mosque members meeting together. Says the Scarritt-Bennett Center's Suha Ahmad-Alsyoufi, "What we've learned is that people do not want to be lectured on the issues that they are experiencing. They want to share their experiences and hear other's perspectives. That is how people grow and come to respect each other's differences." For more information about the Center's work visit [www.scarrittbennett.org](http://www.scarrittbennett.org).

Boulder County, Colorado's **Dialogues on Immigrant Integration (DII)** is a community effort that experiments with many different forms of dialogue and found it required creativity and persistence to get various audiences to mix. Rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all model, they prefer a combination of large, small and one-on-one dialogues, which they hold in familiar and comfortable settings. One of DII's greatest dialogue successes was with the University of Colorado at Boulder, which brought together immigrant workers, students and faculty. Dialogue involving these different segments of the University community had a salutary effect as greater respect for each other emerged. The University has since adopted dialogues as an ongoing practice and incorporated them into campus life.

DII also created policymaker dialogues that brought together school board members, city council members, county commissioners and city administrators to meet with both documented and undocumented immigrants to hear directly from the community. The county government now uses these dialogues and frames them as dialogues for inclusion and involvement, focusing on all populations in need, including those in poverty and the homeless. DII is finalizing a public version of the dialogue guide and materials they developed for use in their program. For more information, contact Leslie Irwin at [lirwin@bouldercounty.org](mailto:lirwin@bouldercounty.org).

## Addressing the Elephant in the Room: the Issue of Illegal Immigration

Holding a dialogue without recognizing the immigration policy challenges facing the country and the controversies over illegal immigration is next to impossible. In a room with a diverse set of opinions, it is very difficult not to become bogged down in a debate over illegal immigration. Any conversation with the undecided should not begin by addressing issues related to illegal immigration, although those challenges will have their place later in the discussion. Dialogue facilitators need to develop strategies for acknowledging the volatile illegal immigration issue. Says long-time facilitator Gurudev Khalsa from Trilight Development, “What makes something an elephant in the first place is when people won’t talk about it. It’s important that dialogues create a space for people to feel they can listen to and talk about a range of issues, including that of illegal immigration. While those in the dialogue may not immediately come to a broad agreement on such a contentious issue, many may see that there are a set of activities that they can find common ground around and indeed work on together.” By listening to immigrant stories and experiences at dialogues, participants are more likely to develop a better understanding of the human impacts of immigration policies. Through a dialogue process, they are more likely to begin arriving at common understandings on issues and begin working together on solutions, including policy solutions.



### *Opportunities and Challenges for Using Dialogue*

- Dialogue brings together diverse community members whose lives don’t typically intersect and gives them the opportunity to listen to and learn from each other in a unique way.
- Trust and relationships can begin to take hold over time.
- Dialogues require a significant amount of time for planning, coordination and follow-up.
- Without a highly trained facilitator, they may fall short of their objectives.
- Engaging those who are not already favorably inclined requires creativity and perseverance.
- Promising places to recruit potential participants include religious institutions, schools and workplaces.

### 3. JOINT PROJECTS

Dialogues provide a concrete opportunity to bring together those with different backgrounds to experience a shared event and begin developing connections with each other. However, they may be more effective in fostering meaningful relationships if linked to ongoing activities that bring together immigrant and receiving communities members in significant ways. The project possibilities are endless: responding to a community crisis (forest fires sweeping through a town), working on an issue of common concern (improving academic achievement at the local school), participating in an activity of mutual interest (gardening or sports) or helping individual immigrants integrate into the mainstream (learning English or passing citizenship exams). These joint undertakings can be transformational for the participants.

#### *Issues to Consider for Joint Projects*

- **Assess the volunteer pool. Many programs use university students, some work with retirees, and others engage Baby Boomers who want to be active in their communities. Depending on the purpose of the project, immigrants can also serve as excellent volunteers since many already informally help other members of their ethnic group.**
- **Explore the availability of more structured volunteer programs, such as AmeriCorps.**
- **Volunteers need to be nurtured, trained and coached. Managing volunteers requires considerable time and planning. It is important to strike the right balance between providing structure and allowing for flexibility to keep volunteers motivated and productive.**
- **Volunteer opportunities need to build off of the interests of both immigrants and members of receiving communities in order to succeed.**

### Examples from the Field

*Gardening.* In Wilmer, Minnesota, the Hmong and receiving community recognized the universal language of gardening side-by-side. They began by attending a learning circle event at **Augsburg College's Center for Democracy and Citizenship**, which brings together immigrants, college students and other community members to work on issues of mutual interest. Together, this group decided to embrace gardening as a method for building community across languages and cultures. The Hmong, particularly isolated elders, became involved in a community gardening project where they grew vegetables. A landlord donated land for the garden and receiving community members provided tools, and seed and helped work the land. The landlord also converted an apartment into a community space where people could share meals. It became the site of potlucks, featuring Asian and Swedish dishes. For more about Augsburg College's model visit [www.augsburg.edu/democracy](http://www.augsburg.edu/democracy).

*English Acquisition.* Colorado-based **Intercambio Uniting Communities** has served 7,500 ESL students matched with 3,500 volunteers since its inception in 2001. Intercambio's dual focus is on helping immigrants learn English, strengthen literacy skills and succeed in life while engaging the receiving community as volunteers in this process, fostering friendships and cultural perspective. About half of their volunteers work with small groups of learners, and the other half work one-on-one in the home. Intercambio is ambitious in its language instruction goals, incorporating pre- and post-test assessments for their learners and using a 12-level curriculum complete with lesson plans. Volunteers establish and strengthen relationships with students over time, a function of being together weekly and working together towards a positive goal. Some volunteers come with a passion for intercultural work, but many have little if any cross-cultural experience. Intercambio's volunteer survey results indicate that 50% report increases in learning about immigrant struggles; 61% report establishing intercultural friendships as a result of volunteering; and 83% report developing a better understanding of different cultures. Their surveys with immigrant participants are equally enlightening. After one or more sessions, 87% of ESL students report seeing their community as welcoming and 76% report being comfortable with different cultures. Intercambio's model is now being replicated across the country. Curricula, volunteer training materials and a database package are available for purchase at [www.intercambioweb.org](http://www.intercambioweb.org).

*Provide ESL and Citizenship Services.* The **Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights' (ICIRR)** Uniting America Campaign is deploying AmeriCorps members to host agencies in Illinois to connect immigrants with native-born Illinoisans through volunteerism. AmeriCorps service learning will focus on English, civics, after school tutoring and GED studies. The AmeriCorps members will recruit and train volunteers, reach out to new Uniting America partner organizations and plan a large number of community unity events that will connect immigrants and native-born communities. The goals of Uniting America are three-fold: to provide needed services to immigrants in the state, to develop transformational relationships between volunteers and immigrants, and to foster community integration. ICIRR is particularly eager to bring this idea to specific Chicago suburbs, where immigration is a newer phenomenon.

ICIRR has a long, established track record of encouraging immigrant naturalization and civic participation. ICIRR is a Welcoming America affiliate and is embedding the new receiving communities approach in this campaign to add an additional strategic dimension that builds on ICIRR's prior successes with service delivery to immigrants in Illinois, while recognizing the importance of changing the hearts and minds of longer-term residents through deliberate efforts at fostering contact. To learn more about the effort visit [www.icirr.org](http://www.icirr.org).

*Citizenship.* The **City of Littleton's Citizenship Mentoring Program** pairs citizen mentors one-on-one with immigrants studying for the naturalization test. Volunteers are recruited through existing partner networks and word-of-mouth. Many volunteers are retirees who enjoy helping immigrants prepare for the exam. Not only have nearly all immigrants passed their citizenship exams, but many immigrants and volunteers also report developing very close friendships with each other in the process. A paid staff member of the Littleton Immigrant Integration Initiative coordinates the project, including the training and matching of volunteers. The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) provides materials and training for the effort and has singled it out as a unique program. The mentoring model has also been used in English language classes. More information about the work in Littleton is available at [www.littletongov.org/bemis/irc](http://www.littletongov.org/bemis/irc).

*Health Literacy.* In an effort to improve access to health care for older adult immigrants and refugees, **Temple University's Project SHINE** pairs AmeriCorps volunteers with foreign-born elders to help them improve their English, understand health information, navigate the health system and lead active, healthy lives. Project SHINE's effort has engaged hundreds of hard-to-reach seniors in Philadelphia, Greensboro and Denver through volunteer-led health literacy classes, health workshops and one-on-one health mentoring. In many cases, both native-born and foreign-born AmeriCorps members work side-by-side in immigrant communities. In Denver, a new cadre of Baby Boomer-aged volunteers has been recruited to lend significant expertise and energy to the project. Not only does Project SHINE deepen the cross-cultural understanding of many AmeriCorps members who may not have worked with such populations before, but these relationships have helped typically isolated seniors engage and participate more actively in the community. Project SHINE also has a long history of helping elder immigrants with naturalization using university student volunteers. A variety of volunteer resources and the Project SHINE curriculum are available at [www.projectshine.org](http://www.projectshine.org).

*Youth Mentoring.* Originally developed by **Project FINE** in Winona, MN to help immigrant and refugee youth overcome the challenges of having a foot in two different cultural worlds, that of their parents and that of their peers, the Diversity Youth Quest (DYQ) program consists of monthly presentations by local professionals, summer activities and youth mentoring. Working with local university faculty, college students are referred to DYQ to serve as volunteers. Most volunteers are white, middle class students from small towns across Minnesota and Wisconsin who often have had minimal interaction with people from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Many are interested in pursuing a career in education. DYQ prepares and trains them to become mentors to immigrant youth. Mentors meet with students weekly over a one-semester period. The volunteers also learn how to conduct home visits, which tend to be eye-opening experiences for them. A significant part of the program involves homework help and serving as a college-aged role model for youth typically underrepresented in higher education. Eighteen of the 22 seniors who had a mentor applied for college last year and 16 were accepted. College mentors are impacted as well. Mentors record their experiences in journals throughout the mentoring process and document how much the experience will impact their future teaching. More on the program is available at [www.projectfine.org](http://www.projectfine.org).

*Crisis Response and Community Betterment.* Certain events provide unique opportunities to highlight the value of a community's immigrant population. Times of crisis such as natural disasters create great stress in communities but may also reduce, at least temporarily, traditional divisions among immigrants and the native born. In times of crisis, when all hands are on deck, they can work together side-by-side to put out a forest fire, or lay sand bags to prevent a flood, without thinking about the cultural differences that sometimes divide them. Similarly, when a community rallies together to rebuild after a crisis or create a new community amenity, the helpful hands of immigrant neighbors may be particularly welcome and very effective at changing mainstream perceptions. These types of projects help integrate immigrants living in the shadows or in segregated neighborhoods who would otherwise have little contact with the mainstream by humanizing them and showcasing their value. The **National Day Labor Organizing Network** has worked with a number of its local day labor affiliate organizations around the country to promote this type of participation by marginalized immigrant populations such as day laborers. More on the Network is available at [www.ndlong.org](http://www.ndlong.org).



Photo courtesy of Lena Karabushin

### *Opportunities and Challenges for Joint Projects*

- **Joint projects provide both immigrants and receiving community members the opportunity to develop understanding and a relationship with each other over a longer period of time, based on a mutual interest. These connections may hold greater promise for being transformational.**
- **Among certain population segments, such as university students, retirees and certain cultural groups, there is openness to volunteerism, so engagement may prove relatively straightforward.**
- **Joint projects typically require significant staff time for coordination, volunteer support and ongoing coaching.**
- **Joint projects tend to be very grassroots in nature; their long-term impact may be difficult to measure.**

## Building Meaningful Connections through Emergency Preparedness: City of Cupertino, CA

Located in California's Silicon Valley, Cupertino witnessed a huge number of Asian arrivals in the 1980s and mid 1990s. Cupertino's earlier wave of immigrants from Eastern Europe had been active in strengthening the quality of the schools, so when the high tech boom brought Asian immigrants to the area, they chose Cupertino because of the strong school system. Unfortunately, conflicts between the long-standing Eastern Europeans and Asians began to build, and there was a growing divide between the two. People began to call the city to ask why signs were being posted in Chinese, for example. Housing became an issue, as the modest homes of the Europeans began to be dwarfed by large, sometimes colorful homes where multiple generations of Asians resided. Asian students began excelling in the local schools, which caused tensions as some community members felt their families were being left behind.

In 2000 that climate began to change. City Manager David Knapp had always wanted to integrate people from different backgrounds into the community in meaningful ways, to see what he saw: differences were a source of strength. Knapp felt that if people recognized their common goals they could draw on a broader set of experiences and perspectives to develop better solutions to their problems than a less diverse group could. Knapp believed emergency preparedness concerns related to earthquakes, crime and terrorism were an opportunity to focus on common needs and help people get to know their neighbors.

The city's approach to building contact was to:

**Organize block parties.** They began working with neighborhoods to block off residential streets so neighbors could have a common place to meet and get to know each other. Residents could request presentations by Neighborhood Watch and emergency services offices. These events were designed to be educational and fun. The fire truck and ambulance were on display. The parks and recreation department entertained the children, and everyone brought food to share. This festive atmosphere facilitated neighbor-to-neighbor interaction.

**Identify block leaders.** Knapp was searching for community leaders. He zeroed in on the people who came to city hall to complain. These individuals weren't satisfied with the status quo and had leadership potential. He invited them to the next block leader meeting, held 4-5 times per year, when city block leaders convene to discuss issues. Cupertino now has 350 block leaders, but someday they hope to have 1,000. In the first two years, most block captains were white. Now, 60-75% hail from different racial and ethnic groups.

**Block leaders organize the block.** The role of the block leader is to visit each house on the block and develop a list or map of the block, complete with emails. Blocks range in size from 5-300 houses, and the city provides administrative support to the block captains. Once the email list is developed, people can reach out to each other about issues, build relationships and form a network. When new people move into the neighborhood, the block captain immediately visits them, shares the email list, and adds their contact information. The city's costs of enforcing code violations have plummeted because neighbors are now much more likely to work out disagreements directly rather than involve city government.

**Emergency preparedness trainings.** Cupertino provides one- to three-hour emergency preparedness trainings for blocks. Once they are trained, residents conduct emergency drills together. This breaks down barriers as people work together to keep each other safe.

For those interested in replicating this approach, Knapp suggests emphasizing the time and cost savings to local governments. The more reliant a community is on itself, the less it needs from the government, as is the case of decreased code enforcement. One problem Cupertino didn't have to face because its different ethnic groups are fairly evenly distributed within its neighborhoods is segregation. In more segregated communities, bridge building with different cultures may be more difficult if the blocks are less diverse. A blockleader brochure, binder and other materials are available at [www.cupertino.org/blockleader](http://www.cupertino.org/blockleader).

## 4. LESSONS FROM BRIDGING RACIAL DIVIDES, ALLIANCE BUILDING AND BATTLING HATE CRIMES

Those working in the immigrant integration field should recognize that building meaningful contact with the longer-term community means planning for the involvement of all community members, including long-term African Americans, Hispanics and Asians. In addition, foreign-born individuals who are more established may no longer wish to identify with newcomer communities or may only identify with their own ethnic group but not a larger cohort of diverse immigrants. In short, bridging racial divides can be daunting.

There has been a considerable amount of work and study devoted to bridging racial divides in recent years. This toolkit is far from a definitive resource on this topic. However, it does provide some ideas for how to begin considering ways to broach the topic and links to existing resources that may be helpful starting points.

### *Issues to Consider for Bridging Racial Divides*

- **Competition regarding the social hierarchy.** One perception is that Latinos or other immigrant groups coming into a community aren't seen as the bottom of the social and political hierarchy. There is concern that African Americans may occupy that position, even after newer groups arrive.
- **Prejudice is a two way street.** Sometimes dialogues between African Americans and Latinos may focus more on African Americans overcoming stereotypes about Latinos, with less emphasis on helping Latinos overcome prejudice towards African Americans.
- **Great diversity among and between different racial and ethnic groups.** Whether of an African, Asian or Hispanic background, different groups vary enormously in their immigrant history, country of origin, language, culture and educational levels. Finding ways to bring these different groups together is an enormous task. For example, there is great diversity within the black community, with significant differences between how African Americans, African immigrants, Afro-Caribbeans and Afro-Latinos view themselves and each other.
- **Alliance building needs a long-term approach.** If the impetus for alliance building is short-term policy change that favors immigrants rather than longer-term efforts to secure mutually beneficial change for immigrants and other traditionally disadvantaged groups, this strategy will likely erode trust over time. Campaigns must be sensitive to the struggles facing people who have been here for generations. It is preferable to support the creation of a more unified movement that recognizes shared needs and desires.

### Dialogue Resources from Efforts to Bridge Racial Divides

For many years there were few resources to support the coming together of different communities of color. There are now many promising efforts in this area, far too many to list. Here are a few key resources:

Produced by the **National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights**, *Bridge*, or Building a Race and Immigration Dialogue in the Global Era, is a set of tools and exercises to help immigrant and refugee members engage in conversations around racism, labor, migration and global economic structures. The tool has received widespread recognition and use over many years. Resources are available at [www.nnirr.org](http://www.nnirr.org).

**CASA de Maryland** and the **Center for Community Change** created *Crossing Borders*, a multicultural curriculum that covers demographic shifts among communities of color, a history of African Americans and immigrants, and contentious issues. Numerous trainings for leaders and community members have been held using this curriculum. Information is available at [www.casademaryland.org](http://www.casademaryland.org).

**The Program on Intergroup Relations** at the University of Michigan uses a curriculum for college students that includes dialogues that are structured to explore identity groups defined by race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic class, gender, sexual orientation or national origin. More information about their process is available at [www.igr.umich.edu](http://www.igr.umich.edu).

**Initiatives of Change** has community trust-building programs designed to overcome divisions of race, culture, economics and politics. Their curriculum uses teaching, dialogue and experiential learning. The approach is described at [www.us.iofc.org](http://www.us.iofc.org).

**Black Alliance for Just Immigration** organizes small group discussions on African American-immigrant relations among African Americans. More details about their work are available at [www.blackalliance.org](http://www.blackalliance.org).

Angela Stuesse and the **Kirwan Institute**, with guidance from an advisory committee of activists and organizers around the country, are currently spearheading a project aimed at cataloguing materials such as those mentioned above. They are working to create an online resource center that will support communities new to intergroup relations work. More information about the project is available at <http://www.kirwaninstitute.org/research/talking-about-race/rooting-intergroup-relations-for-social-justice-a-curricular-%E2%80%9Cmapping%E2%80%9D-of-the-field/>.

## Tips for Bridging Racial Divides

- **Start by looking for mutually beneficial ways for communities of color to support each other and build relationships. This may include learning from African Americans about their experiences in America and drawing parallels between those stories and those of immigrants. The dialogue tools developed from this field of work may also prove useful.**
- **Find commonalities between different groups and use those to draw people together. Religion is one such example. With one-third of the Muslims in the U.S. being African American, religion may be one avenue to bring together some African Americans and newer immigrant populations to strengthen bonds.**
- **Model behavior for communities of color working together cooperatively and respectfully. One helpful approach may be for immigrant organizations to model the behavior they would like to see by bringing African Americans onto their leadership teams and having them serve in top organizational positions. This contact-building behavior at the highest level by immigrant organizations and advocacy groups can provide an important signal to immigrants on how to respond to African Americans. Conversely, African American organizations can do the same by elevating immigrants to leadership roles within their organizations.**
- **Create opportunities for purposeful dialogue. Many dialogues designed to bridge racial divides are neither ongoing nor sustained. Start with a clear understanding of the goal of the dialogue to determine the methodology for and the frequency of dialogue. Recognize that dialogues are complex, requiring the use of trained, experienced facilitators.**

Angela Stuesse of the University of South Florida has worked with the Kirwan Institute of The Ohio State University and others to learn how black-brown dialogues have been employed and to assess their impact. Says Stuesse, “There is a lack of funding support for this type of dialogue work. And, the ability to facilitate conversations around race requires great skill and comfort with topics such as discrimination and prejudice that many people do not have. If black/brown dialogues are not well managed, they can even damage relations. In our research, we found that most organizations engaging in relationship-building work rely heavily on one staff person to lead the effort, and they often don’t have the bench strength to continue once that person burns out, moves on, or has other work priorities to attend to. Moreover, rarely is political education that person’s sole – or even principal – job responsibility, so it is seldom given the attention it deserves.” One solution may be to develop a national list of those skilled at this type of facilitation. Another idea may be to share staffing, leadership and funding across multiple organizations to implement and sustain dialogue efforts into the longer-term and reach a larger base of diverse constituencies.

## Building Alliances with the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) Community

There are growing opportunities to strengthen ties between the LGBT community and immigrants. First, LGBT advocates are becoming increasingly aware of the many immigrants who are LGBT, and to be more effective, they need to see their community in its totality. Secondly, immigrants and the LGBT community have some common adversaries, such as some policymakers who are extremely anti-LGBT and anti-immigrant. And, as the nation’s population grows increasingly diverse, the LGBT community recognizes the need to build long-term alliances with, and respond to the concerns of, immigrants. Two organizations in Oregon serve as examples for effective alliance building between immigrant and LGBT-focused organizations: **CAUSA** and **Basic Rights Oregon**. They have worked to develop two toolkits: one for helping the LGBT community learn more about immigrants, and a second is to help immigrant groups strengthen their support for the LGBT community. Both are available at the Western States Center website at [www.westernstatescenter.org/our-work/uniting\\_communities](http://www.westernstatescenter.org/our-work/uniting_communities).



## Responding to Hate Crimes

When community tensions are on the rise, hate crimes send extreme signals that there are deep problems. A high profile hate crime brings a new sense of urgency to contact building efforts. Eric Ward has spent much of his career preventing and responding to hate crimes. For 13 years Ward worked to counter the rise of an organized white supremacist movement that was emerging in the Pacific Northwest and Rocky Mountain region in the early 1990s. "Ninety human rights task forces in six states were organized in local communities to serve as a counter to the hate. Most of the task force members were white, since these were not racially diverse communities. We were able to work with people across the political spectrum, from traditional, conservative farmers to those with more liberal views," says Ward. Based on his experiences, Ward recommends considering the issues below.

### *Issues to Consider for Battling Hate Crimes*

- **Create a moral barrier around hate. Focus on creating a more positive community climate. The moral argument works well when it is related to hate crime and violence. Show community leaders the negative impact bigotry has on the community.**
- **Provide many opportunities for interaction between diverse people. Even in communities that are not racially diverse, opportunities need to be created that promote interaction. For example, Ward arranged for black speakers to tour local community venues for Martin Luther King's birthday and Black History Month, and he used middle and high school assemblies to counter what students might be hearing from their parents and stereotypes from the media. Focus on the needs and concerns of receiving communities and help them consider how to see their world differently in ways that help them.**
- **Avoid demonizing members of the community and focus on hate group leaders instead. The members live in the community and are not all necessarily bad people in their interactions with neighbors. Focus on the leaders in order to highlight the contradiction between bigotry and the positive values the community upholds. Tactics can include targeting hate leaders with exposes and reports, pressuring hotels to cancel their meetings, and other approaches.**

When Somalis first came to Shelbyville, Tennessee to work in the meatpacking industry, they were under immediate suspicion, with perhaps no sector less welcoming than local media. The media coverage of the Somalis immediately became inaccurate, inflammatory and damaging to relations between the Somali community and the broader receiving community. There were no attempts to get to know the Somalis better or to deliver more nuanced reporting. Rather, messages were consistently negative and perpetuated stereotypes.

When newcomers move to town, all too often the media sensationalizes the story and assumes the worst about their new neighbors. However, communities can counteract negative messages and highlight the fact that the vast majority of immigrants are hard working, contributing members of society.

Assuming a proactive approach to communications is the crux. Meeting with editorial boards early on, engaging journalists in building connections with newcomers, and pitching positive media stories are all part of the solution. Other activities may include using letters to the editor, billboards and social media campaigns to tell a different story about demographic change.

Indeed, in Shelbyville, the leaders of Welcoming Tennessee's local Welcoming Committee organized meetings between the local newspaper and Somali leaders. They began working to develop positive relationships between immigrants and the broader community and invited the media in to learn more. Over time these efforts paid off, and the local coverage became more constructive, leading to more positive perceptions among the receiving community and more positive relations overall. Such progress is documented in the film *Welcome to Shelbyville* described later in this chapter.

For those interested in strengthening communication strategies that reach receiving communities, there are several aspects to consider. First, there are communication activities, ranging from comprehensive campaigns to the use of radio, that show promise. In addition, considering messages that resonate with a diverse audience and using effective spokespeople are critical elements.

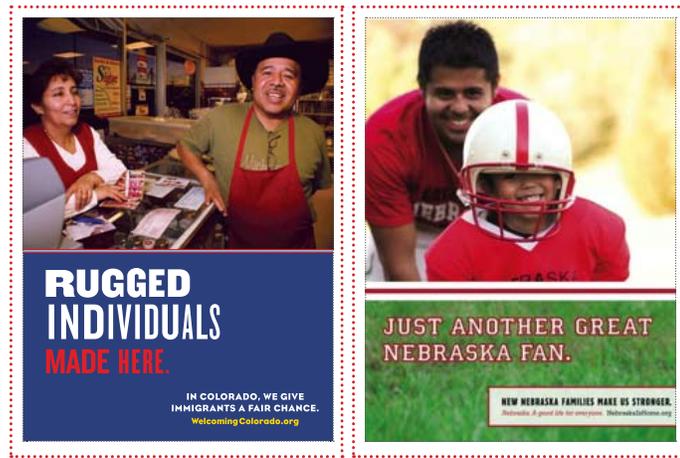


## 1. COMMUNICATION RESOURCES

### Local Media Campaigns

While they require a significant investment of time and resources, sustained media campaigns are most effective for changing the conversation about immigrants locally. Rather than a stand-alone event or activity, local media campaigns seek out ongoing opportunities to disseminate positive messages to receiving communities in a variety of ways. Earned media campaigns are most common, for they rely on earning newspaper, radio, internet or television coverage, often after pitching stories to reporters, and writing op-eds, staging events or using other methods to attract media attention.

While paid media is expensive, it is an important avenue to consider for reaching a broader public, particularly those who may not see or hear other messages. Paid advertisements offer people a different message about the community they live in and ideally provide an opportunity for them to learn more or to get involved.



One successful media campaign model is the one used by **Welcoming America** and its local affiliates in 18 states working to change the conversation around immigrants in their communities. Each Welcoming America affiliate begins by tailoring their messages to the local culture and environment. For instance, in Colorado, the affiliate emphasizes the values of independence and hard work, aligning with the rugged frontier mentality that many find attractive about the state. In Nebraska, messages play off the Cornhuskers, Nebraska's famous and locally beloved college football team. Using positive, catchy messages, the affiliates have created advertisements for display on billboards, or on mass transit vehicles and spots on television and radio. These messages are seen or heard by a large mainstream audience. To view innovative communications work from some of the welcoming affiliates, visit Colorado's site at [www.welcomingcolorado.org](http://www.welcomingcolorado.org), Nebraska's site at [www.nebraskaishome.org](http://www.nebraskaishome.org) and North Carolina's site at [www.unitingnc.org](http://www.unitingnc.org).

**Long Island Wins** has incorporated a strong communications component to its work. Its website serves as the online hub for local immigration news. Daily staff and guest blog postings about immigrant issues ensure that content stays fresh and relevant. In addition, staff writes a monthly column for a newspaper chain that is distributed to 20 local papers. While Long Island Wins ran some positive television ads early on, the expense made those efforts hard to sustain. For a first-hand view of their communications, visit [www.longislandwins.com](http://www.longislandwins.com).

In fact, the greatest challenge facing local communications campaigns may be sustainability and cost. Research on communications strategies from other fields suggests that communications campaigns need to be ongoing to be effective. When they end, messages are often forgotten. It may be that paid communications efforts are initially critical to reach a significant number of local residents and capture their attention, but most effective when combined with the contact strategies discussed earlier in this toolkit and reinforced by strong receiving communities leaders echoing the messages of unity expressed in the advertising campaign.

## Issues to Consider for Developing Local Media Campaigns

- **Get to know your audience – where does the public stand on immigrants and immigration in the community?**
- **Develop and refine your messages so they are powerful and consistent.**
- **Engage corporate or civic support where possible.**
- **Line up the most effective spokespeople, preferably from credible and authentic members of receiving communities.**
- **Plan for a response from elements in your own constituencies (such as those advocating for open borders) who may inadvertently undermine the effort's credibility, as well as from vocal immigration opponents.**
- **Choose the best communication vehicles for getting the messages out into the community.**
- **Link the campaign to a specific call to action, such as having supporters sign up on a website so contact information is captured in a database for follow-up and ongoing communication.**
- **Aim for “saturation” to ensure that receiving communities members are hearing positive messages on the radio, in the newspaper, at places of worship, in schools, and through many other community venues.**
- **Avoid using a communications strategy in isolation without connecting with contact and leadership efforts.**

## Other Communication Vehicles

Short of launching a full-blown communications campaign, there are many potential avenues available to community actors to reinforce unifying messages with different audiences. The lowest-cost approach is to engage local media. This can be accomplished through activities such as writing letters to the editor or op-eds in the local newspaper, or scheduling meetings with the local newspaper editorial board or television news editors. Additional strategies include the following:

### Social Media and Networking

Social networking is viewed as an area of great promise though there is limited information about the extent to which it has been used intentionally as a tool to engage broader

receiving communities. Part of this may be a generational divide. While the younger generation in some organizations may be using social networking to mobilize younger constituents, its utility with older audiences is less certain. Social networking is a useful tool for expanding outreach, and many organizations have begun by creating Facebook pages. Nebraska Appleseed, for instance, found that once it began posting events like upcoming trainings on Facebook, its RSVPs suddenly doubled. **Welcoming America** hosts Friends of Welcoming, an online platform that promotes social networking around creating inclusive, welcoming environments at [www.friendsofwelcoming.org](http://www.friendsofwelcoming.org).

## Film

Film is an effective vehicle to highlight the plight of immigrants and the challenges facing receiving communities. It can reach a broad cross-section of the community, spur dialogue and promote ongoing action.

**Welcome to Shelbyville** is a documentary film that portrays the challenges facing immigrants and longer-term residents alike in Shelbyville, Tennessee after a number of Somalis move in to work at a local meatpacking plant. The film features receiving communities pioneers Welcoming Tennessee, a project of the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition and the model for all subsequent Welcoming America initiatives. **Active Voice** played a key role in disseminating the film and helping practitioners use it as a discussion tool. Says Active Voice Executive Director Ellen Schneider, “The use of film to promote immigrant integration has evolved significantly in recent years. In 2000, *The New Americans* chronicled the trauma of immigrant families leaving their homelands. The film brought awareness to new gateway communities of immigrants’ stories. Later, *Farmingville* followed the crisis facing Long Island once immigrants had arrived and negativity was allowed to fester. *Welcome to Shelbyville* takes this work a step further, showing different community members proactively building bonds with each other. It highlights how we all need to be talking about our shared hopes and our relationships, not just about immigration. As Active Voice continues to expand its work, we are in a new phase, looking for these types of stories to help build what we believe is an exciting and nascent movement to engage all community members, a movement that film can be a huge part of.”

The dissemination strategy for *Welcome to Shelbyville* emphasized building connections between people at the local level. The screenings gave viewers a common text from which to begin a conversation, and the likeable and diverse cast of characters in the film made it easy for audience members to connect with them. A wide range of community members were invited to view the film, and facilitators at each screening led discussions designed to draw out key themes. The film’s outreach also included a national television broadcast, expanded content through social networking, shortened versions for continued use by trainers and facilitators, and

deeper contact-building efforts in two pilot communities. Active Voice attributes the positive audience reaction to the film to the centrality of the human story at its core. More information about the film, as well as scenes for discussion and the opportunity for visitors to write their own stories, are available at [www.shelbyvillemultimedia.org](http://www.shelbyvillemultimedia.org). Also on the site is the “Building a Nation of Neighbors” video module set that provides story-based tools for using the Welcoming Tennessee model featured in the film.

**Not in Our Town (NIOT)** is a national effort to combat hate in communities by using film to tell stories of positive action taken in response to hate and motivating others to do so in their communities. The NIOT film series began in 1995, after a number of hate crimes plagued Billings, Montana. The first film explored Billings’ response and was aired nationally. The filmmakers found that after viewing the film, people in cities and towns across the nation were eager to talk about the climate in their own communities and were inspired to take action against hate. The Billings film screenings across the country were used to launch sustained action to build inclusive, respectful communities, and spawned the creation of many NIOT affiliates.

NIOT’s newest film is *Light in the Darkness*, based on the murder of an Ecuadorian immigrant in Patchogue, Long Island in 2008 and the community’s attempt to repair its damaged social fabric in the wake of this horrific hate crime. It shows immigrants and receiving community members working side-by-side over a two-year period to change the town’s climate. A national television broadcast and community screenings are underway around the country beginning in September 2011. Planning and discussion guides are available, as well as outreach resources and evaluation documents, at [www.niot.org/lightinthedarkness](http://www.niot.org/lightinthedarkness).

**Asian Americans for Community Involvement (AACI)** is a nonprofit health and human services agency serving Asians in the Silicon Valley. AACI uses a locally created film highlighting Asian American stories to host five dialogues, each 2-3 hours. During the dialogues, immigrants and native-born participants share their personal immigrant stories, discuss the contributions of immigrants they know, and discuss how to promote immigrant integration. People also develop personal action plans, identifying goals and action steps for themselves. The sessions end with participants sharing how they have been impacted by the event. AACI seeks out non-immigrant community members for its dialogues by partnering with organizations with broad constituencies such as institutions of higher education and faith-based organizations. One partner was a Jewish organization with older members. By hosting a dialogue in the Jewish Community Center, AACI was able to attract 150 people from that community. Immigrants also attend events to promote two-way sharing. Film and discussion guide are available at [www.asianamericanvoices.org](http://www.asianamericanvoices.org).

## Radio

**The Immigrant Stories Project** is the brainchild of Walter Gallacher, a retired marketing director for Colorado Mountain College, who lives in the Roaring Fork Valley of Colorado. While Aspen is the most famous of the communities in the region, many other smaller towns make up the Valley and are home to long-term residents and immigrant workers, many of whom work in the tourist industry. As a member of the local immigrant integration collaborative, Gallacher began considering how National Public Radio's Story Corps project might be adapted to feature stories of people with immigrant backgrounds. "At that time, there was a growing climate of fear and loathing in the community, especially towards undocumented immigrants," Gallacher says. "The climate was becoming less and less open to newcomers. I feel strongly that stories reveal our shared humanity. It is much more difficult to objectify people once you hear their story."

Through word of mouth, Gallacher began collecting stories from those with recent or more distant immigrant backgrounds, recording people describing their histories in their own words. Among the stories he has featured include a Hungarian survivor of the Russian gulag, a Vietnamese woman who runs the local nail salon and at age 10 fled Vietnam in a boat, and a local Italian whose family faced discrimination in the 1920's. Gallacher juxtaposes these stories with those of newly arrived Latino families to help people step back and consider the role immigrants play in the community.

Every other Monday a new story airs on the radio and the same story appears in the newspaper. The newspaper's readership polling shows that it is one of the paper's most popular features. In addition, with the 150 stories now developed, the radio features them daily at 5:44 pm, recycling them so that each story plays three times each year. Gallacher also keeps a blog of the stories at [www.immigrantcolorado.blogspot.com](http://www.immigrantcolorado.blogspot.com). They are available on Facebook as "Immigrant Stories Project" and more about integration in the region is at [www.communityintegration.net](http://www.communityintegration.net).

Gallacher receives many requests from mainstream groups in the community who want to learn more about this project. These requests validate his approach of using personal stories to create a more positive community climate. He suggests that others interested in an immigrant stories project consult the National Public Radio's Story Corps "how to" manual for guidance on implementing a similar project. Gallacher is happy to help those who contact him.

## Participatory Theater

**Playback Theater** is an international program that established a branch on Long Island after the 2008 hate crime and murder of Marcelo Lucero. Playback Theater uses a unique methodology to influence the community's attitude towards immigrants. Audience members are asked to share their own

personal stories around a particular issue. After people stand up and tell their stories, the actors then improvise and act out what they have heard. On Long Island, the focus of the stories has been on immigration. For instance, on St. Patrick's Day, the director of Playback began by explaining that Playback was formed on Long Island because of the murder. He then described his own Irish heritage, which included the fact that he had never understood why his Irish father was so fearful of the police until he learned that his Dad was undocumented. In this way, people are led to sensitive topics, without a lecture. The shared stories and diverse cast create a unifying experience around the emerging themes. For more information about this model, visit [www.playbacktheaterlongisland.com](http://www.playbacktheaterlongisland.com).

Another community theater effort on Long Island is **Teatro Experimental Yerbabruja**, which performs a play written by the theater company's director called *What Killed Marcelo Lucero?* This is a powerful piece that strives to build cultural understanding and influence social change. It asks, for example, why no one prevented the hate crime. The performance stops mid-stream to answer this question with two sides facing off, each holding signs. One group holds with posters that read "Stop racism," while the other group's posters read "They broke the law and should be deported." The director enters the stage at this point, tells the actors to freeze, and invites the audience to come on stage and create an ending. In one case, an audience member took away all of the posters and paired people from the opposing sides and had them hold hands. The theater company has since added a panel discussion at the end to give the audience a chance to discuss the play. More details are available at [www.teatroyerbabruja.org](http://www.teatroyerbabruja.org).

## Challenges and Opportunities for Using Communication Strategies

- A mainstream audience is much more likely to listen and respond favorably to communications when they come from sources they respect and trust.
- Arts and cultural venues are promising vehicles for reaching diverse audiences. There are many creative ways to focus on immigrant integration themes.
- Communication campaigns can be expensive and time consuming. However, incorporating messages and stories into existing communication vehicles such as websites, newsletters, and public statements may be less burdensome and fairly simple ways to start.
- In order to justify the time and expense of launching a communication campaign, being able to measure impact is very important. However, the national "noise" and media attention around the issue can make evaluating the impact of a local media effort difficult.

## 2. MESSAGING CONSIDERATIONS

In trying to engage receiving communities members, it is important to understand their current views of immigration and the immigrants in their communities. While this will vary community by community, there is national data that indicates that views about immigration have become increasingly polarized in recent years, with the country deeply divided over immigration reform. The economic downturn has also negatively impacted perceptions of newcomers. Current thinking is that the general public now views immigrants in the following way:

- 20% view immigrants very positively
- 30% lean positively towards immigrants
- 30% lean negatively towards immigrants
- 20% view immigrants very negatively

There is broad agreement that the 20% who are very negatively inclined towards newcomers are unlikely to change, so appealing to them may be a waste of resources. The 20% who view immigrants very positively are current supporters whose numbers and strength need to increase. It is the broad 60% in the middle, best described as ambivalent or unsure, who would benefit from a receiving communities communication strategy and are the target population for the strategies outlined here.

Frank Sharry of America's Voice addresses politically diverse audiences across the country and has advised other communities about how to most effectively speak to these issues. Says Sharry, "What it comes down to is this: does the community want to regard each other in terms of 'us' or 'them'? Most immigrants are eager to feel they are part of a broader 'us' in the community. Immigrant integration is not a separatist movement. There is a lot of overlap in what Joe and José want." Sharry continues, "When immigrants step up and say 'I work hard. I believe in family. I love this community. Yes, I'm proud of my culture and who I am. But this is my home and I want to contribute to it,' it goes a long way towards building support in receiving communities. You don't need to get fancier than that."

National pollster and psychologist Drew Westen shares this advice for those developing communication strategies to connect mainstream Americans with immigrants. "A significant amount of the current immigrant integration language speaks from the immigrant's point of view instead of the view of those in receiving communities. This is a mistake. When trying to reach the ambivalent, the very first statement needs to connect people, much as Barack Obama said 'We are a nation of laws, but we are also a nation of immigrants.'"

### *Issues for Consideration when Speaking to the Unsure*

- **To reach the 60% who are unsure about immigrants, start with messages, spokespeople and communication strategies they can relate to and that speak to their beliefs, recognizing those beliefs may differ significantly from your own.**
- **Though immigrants may have legitimate complaints, avoid language that sounds like entitlement. It will backfire with many audiences.**
- **There are many different types of communications strategies, including those focused on rallying supporters around specific policy goals, as well as those drawing the 60% unsure into a conversation designed to help them understand their new neighbors. The receiving communities language is used to begin a conversation, and over time, helps bring people together by recognizing their shared interests.**

### *Additional Messaging Tips*

**Westen advises the following approach in developing messages for receiving communities members:**

- **Address ambivalence about diversity directly.**
- **Acknowledge the legitimacy of receiving communities member apprehensions and join with people.**
- **Develop effective unifying messages.**
- **Avoid using liberal clichés, even if they personally resonate.**
- **Use positive open-ended statements.**

For years, Westen has tested messages around immigration with diverse audiences and has learned to speak directly to the ambivalent. He finds that when messages are perceived to discount or disregard audience concerns, those messages fail miserably. Rather, speaking directly to and acknowledging the legitimacy of the listener's apprehensions allows a deeper conversation to develop.

Westen successfully engages members of the far right on issues such as immigration reform by beginning with a statement that acknowledges their feelings and then following up with a statement people connect with such as "What bothers me most are politicians who prey on the concerns and prejudices of others." This will resonate even with those in the Tea Party. Another example of an effective unifying message he has tested is "In 30 years, black and brown kids will be half of our workforce. We can't afford for them to stay in poverty and be without computer skills. If we want to retain our leadership in the world we need to support investments in their education." These statements tend to work well because they lead the audience to begin understanding that "they" are really "us." Some of the liberal clichés, such as "diversity" or "shared space" tend to fare poorly with undecided groups, for they are heard as liberal code. Instead, it is much more powerful to start with something concrete, yet aspirational.

Here is another powerful way that Westen begins a conversation with ambivalent groups: "In the military, there is a saying that you never leave anyone behind on the battlefield. Indeed, in today's military, those who are white, black and brown fight alongside each other and know that they need to have each other's back. They know they can count on each other in good and tough times. We need to bring this spirit into civilian life. We all need each other in this country as we move forward into the future. We've all got to have each other's backs." This messaging has worked well with people from all political backgrounds, including those who tend to be more negatively inclined towards immigrants. To an extent, it drapes diversity in the flag, and works because it touches on the country's patriotic ideals.

Westen's experience is that most people are not consciously racist, but that about 70% harbor some negative attitudes towards immigrants. His approach is to speak to views that are held unconsciously, thereby helping individuals to recognize them consciously, so that once prejudices are out in the open they can be addressed. For ordinary citizens, this means de-pathologizing something that may feel racist. One way to begin that conversation might be by saying, "Look, we know that feeling is there, and it's a natural human reaction. When you grow up somewhere and it's your home, and new people

move in who are different, it's easy to have an initial reaction of concern, wondering 'what are these people doing here, in my home?' That's not racism, it's a normal human reaction to wanting home to look and feel like home." This approach allows people to hold negative feelings and not feel guilty about them, but to make them conscious. Then these beliefs can be addressed in a larger conversation that builds a relationship with the audience.

## *Examples from the Field for Messaging*

**Practitioners in the field have been experimenting for some time to see what does and does not resonate with receiving community members. A few of their suggestions include:**

- **Rely on language that is more positive in nature.**
- **Train those who are trying to engage receiving communities members on how phrasing and choice of words can change the conversation.**
- **Focus on the contributions all people make.**
- **Stay away from language like "a flood of people" or other terms that emphasize large, unwieldy numbers. Rather, use terms like "new members of the community."**
- **"Keep values strong in the community" works for some.**
- **Consider terms like "initiative" rather than "campaign" because campaign sounds political.**
- **Recognize that the term "stakeholder" may sound like liberal code.**
- **Avoid using the term "immigrants" as frequently as terms like "families of immigrants" or people from an "immigrant background" and sometimes "newcomers."**
- **Focus on "entire community" language as much as possible.**
- **Be open to framing the issues differently depending on the audience and the goal.**

### 3. SPOKESPEOPLE

There are many potential spokespeople for receiving communities efforts, and it is critical to consider which spokespeople will have the most impact with different audiences.

#### *Issues to Consider for Identifying Spokespeople*

- **Immigrants should speak in their own voice to reach the undecided, but they should not be the first or only spokespeople. When immigrants do share their experiences they should share those that everyone can relate to, so that the audience develops a sense of “we.”**
- **Some spokespeople are viewed as less authentic, perhaps even as opportunistic. In particular, there may be skepticism among the undecided about politicians and faith leaders because they may be seen as seeking to grow their influence or the size of their congregations.**
- **Often it is the surprising or unexpected spokespeople who work best. It is especially powerful to feature ordinary people who can speak candidly about their connection with immigrants:**
  - **The worker wearing a utility belt who describes how much he likes working with José, though before he got to know him, he wasn't too excited about it**
  - **Police officers and firefighters**
  - **A small business owner, who isn't perceived as a corporate interest**
  - **Civic leaders, such as the leader of the League of Women Voters, Kiwanis Club, or retired military personnel**
  - **Well-respected Republicans and/or Tea Party members who recognize the economic contributions of immigrants or are proud of their immigrant roots.**



# LEADERSHIP

Individuals and organizations promoting a proactive immigrant integration agenda and a positive climate for immigrants have long sought support from local receiving communities leaders, knowing that their vocal approval would help build credibility with the broader public. Efforts to cultivate such leaders typically focus on engaging state or local elected officials, business people, members of the faith community, or representatives from the health, education, social services or economic development fields. Identifying potential allies and nurturing their support can be time consuming and unpredictable. Local political dynamics play a big role, making it easier or more challenging to find champions willing to jump into the fray, but personal character may be a more important factor. It takes tremendous courage and commitment for specific individuals to “put themselves out there” on an issue that is often very contentious and polarizing.

Ricardo Gambetta of the National League of Cities has coached a variety of local government leaders on issues of immigration. In explaining some of the challenges they face he notes, “Immigration will always be a politically sensitive topic. People need to identify leaders who both see that addressing these issues is in the best interest of the community and who can put the politics aside to some extent. Not every local leader is willing to do that. As long as there is a national debate on the issue, it will be challenging to get local leaders involved. The politics around this can be toxic and especially difficult for those running for reelection or with different priorities that they want to move forward. However, there are many leaders who recognize the need for local level responses to demographic change and the economic imperatives for doing so. Many local governments are taking the lead in the area of immigrant integration and successfully collaborating with others in their communities.”

While identifying and cultivating receiving communities champions is critical, leadership engagement strategies are unlikely to stand on their own as an effective receiving communities strategy. Engaging local leaders will be more successful if bolstered by contact building strategies, so leaders can develop meaningful connections with newcomers, and by smart communication messages and strategies that help leaders from receiving communities employ the most appropriate language to address integration with the broadest possible audience.

## *Tips for Leadership Engagement*

- **Scan the horizon broadly to find respected mainstream leaders who may be supportive.**
- **Nurture leadership engagement by keeping these leaders informed, meeting with them regularly, and inviting them to events.**
- **When immigrant issues stir up controversy, stand behind mainstream leaders and show support.**
- **Proactively plan for leadership transitions, making sure that immigrant integration efforts are institutionalized when possible to avoid reliance on one particular charismatic leader.**

## 1. CHARACTERISTICS OF A SUPPORTIVE LEADER

Americans desire strong leadership. National pollster Drew Westen of Westen Strategies confirms this. “Americans like it when leaders really lead. Overall, they respond better to positive rather than hateful leadership, but they will take the latter if they can’t find the former. Leaders need to understand that if they don’t offer strong, positive leadership on a topic, a more negative leader will come along to fill the vacuum.” Those who try to engage mainstream leaders cast a wide net, looking for people from different sectors and different walks of life. They look for people who are engaged in issues that affect the community as a whole and think about how to deploy resources most effectively. In some localities, there are human rights commissions, mayoral advisory boards, city councils, and hospital and school boards where there may be opportunities to begin conversations with leaders and help foster contact with immigrants. Darcy Tromanhauser of Nebraska Appleseed believes that, “To find the right person, it’s best to have conversations with many different leaders. Don’t get preoccupied with trying to reach out to one particular person or entity. The trick is to find your way to the leaders who have the right mix of personality and context to be able to speak out. There are leaders out there who have the heart for this work; they just need the encouragement to stand up and be more active. Sometimes it takes time for this to sink in. Allow first conversations to be first conversations. Follow up by bringing these potential allies together, and educate them about experiences from other communities in order to prepare them for more meaningful engagement on these issues in your own community.”

Leaders who are open to engaging in receiving communities work will usually display one or more of the following characteristics:

- They are trusted, credible, respected and influential community members.
- They speak on behalf of a broad constituency.
- They demonstrate moral courage.
- They connect to a familial immigrant history or have immigrant friends or family.
- They are drawn to issues related to the disadvantaged by serving on nonprofit boards, civic commissions or engaging in volunteer activities on behalf of community members.
- They develop bonds across diverse community members or espouse a vision of community that is inclusive of immigrants.

Nonetheless, even when individuals display many of the characteristics that make them likely supporters, it is often difficult to predict if they will in fact be strong proponents of immigrant integration. This inherent unpredictability makes it advisable to continually reach out to and build relationships with a broad cross-section of potential leaders from receiving communities, looking to the government, faith and business sectors, for example, as explained in more detail below.

## 2. CONNECTING WITH GOVERNMENT LEADERS

Engaging the government sector around immigrant integration will usually be more successful if the effort is framed around civic engagement or economic development rather than another diversity initiative. Government wants community members involved in the political process and a dynamic and growing local economy, so naturalization and economic development efforts tend to enjoy wide support.

Ann Morse of the National Conference of State Legislatures puts it this way, “First, focus on commonalities. We all want better infrastructure, great schools, and public safety. Also, be opportunistic and look for ways to draw leaders into your work. It may be best to start with people who have some exposure to immigrants. Many policymakers have jobs outside the legislature. They may run businesses with a significant immigrant staff or clientele. Often we see lawmakers in their one role, and we neglect to see their other roles – as people who have jobs, have children in school, and are members of a broad community.” Morse recommends learning about a leader’s background first and then considering how to develop a mutually beneficial relationship that can grow over

time. Ideally, someone the leader knows well will provide an introduction. Getting to know leaders over lunch, asking them to visit the office, and inviting them to speak at an event are all reasonable, fairly straightforward approaches. If an elected official is difficult to reach, try connecting to their legislative staff. Focus on articulating the benefits of receiving communities efforts and ask how involvement with this work can be of help to leaders. At a minimum, consider meeting with the leaders you are seeking to cultivate twice a year.

One starting point for engaging local government leaders in particular is a shared understanding that good government is inclusive government. The **Institute for Local Government**, the nonprofit research and education affiliate of the League of California Cities and the California State Association of Counties, supports good government in California and provides resources for local leaders who are interested in engaging immigrant communities. Among its many services, the Institute has organized workshops for local officials on changing demographics and the use of ethnic media. The Institute has also supported complete count efforts and has convened local officials with immigrant backgrounds to discuss challenges to immigrant integration. Feedback from immigrant local officials has led to additional Institute initiatives. The Institute partnered with the Asian-Pacific Islander and Latino Caucuses of the League of California Cities to sponsor a presentation by the California Immigrant Policy Center on communication skills for local officials, including effective ways to discuss immigrant-related issues with the public. The Institute has also partnered with Welcoming America and local officials to launch the first immigrant welcoming initiatives in California. See [www.ca-ilg/immigrantengagement](http://www.ca-ilg/immigrantengagement) for more about their work.

## 3. CONNECTING WITH FAITH LEADERS

Connecting with faith-based leaders is increasingly seen as strategic, for these leaders have access to a wide array of community members and are in a unique position to influence their congregations on these issues. Faith constituencies are also likely to engage in volunteerism and charity on behalf of less advantaged members in their communities. Most compelling, perhaps, are faith groups’ longstanding commitment to immigrants and refugees derived from sacred texts. Many serve as national refugee resettlement organizations, mobilizing their affiliates around the country to welcome refugees into local communities. Accordingly, they are key allies to engage in improving relations between the foreign and native born at the local level. For this reason, outreach to all faith groups in a community can be productive. There are an increasing number of interfaith efforts on behalf of immigrants and refugees, as well.

## Engaging Evangelical Leaders

**World Relief**, a national refugee resettlement organization, is working on a number of novel approaches at the local level to engage faith leaders on behalf of immigrants and refugees. One notable effort involves a focus on pastors of evangelical churches. Matt Soerens, a faith organizer with World Relief, is linking the pastors of white and non-white evangelical congregations to promote greater understanding of the issues. Soerens fosters peer-level relationships between traditional and immigrant church leaders and uses messages rooted in scripture about how to treat “strangers” as well as facts about local immigration to dispel myths and stereotypes. Pastors who have witnessed changing demographics in their own or nearby churches tend to be easier to engage.

World Relief brings the voices of national church leaders, such as the pastors of mega-churches who have thousands in their congregations and a strong national following, into communities to speak on behalf of immigrant integration. Says Soerens, “Communication with evangelical leaders is critical, but it must be the right message *and* the right messenger. The Bible should form the primary basis of the conversation. With faith leaders, you can’t lead with an economic or political argument – those are, or at least should be, secondary for evangelicals. The messenger needs to be someone well versed in the Bible who appeals to faith authorities. If they are obedient to the Scripture, churches should be striving to promote unity and work to empower and serve the community. If churches don’t like immigrants, they aren’t doing their job.”

One event World Relief sponsored brought together nearly 200 pastors around issues of immigration. About 75% represented white congregations and the remainder were non-white. The event featured panel presentations from pastors about their congregational practices, including sponsoring a refugee family, providing ESL classes, and ministry opportunities. For lunch, they broke into small groups and were hosted in the homes of immigrants with similar faith backgrounds. They shared a home cooked meal and their personal stories. People reported later that lunch was the most powerful part of their day, for it successfully built contact between pastors and the immigrant community. More resources are available at [www.welcomingthestranger.com](http://www.welcomingthestranger.com) and <http://UnDocumented.tv>.

## 4. CONNECTING WITH BUSINESS LEADERS

In some communities, business leaders may be open to playing a more active role. Immigrants are part of their workforce and often part of their consumer base. Many employers are frustrated by national immigration laws that make it difficult for them to hire the people they need and force them to enforce immigration laws in their workplaces by checking the immigration status of their employees. But the politics of immigration can be tricky to negotiate and business leaders want to avoid attracting undue attention, particularly from immigration opponents. As a result, business leaders tend to be less vocal on immigration matters than might be expected.

Cultivating relationships with local chambers of commerce is a great place to start. The **Tennessee Immigrant & Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC)** has always been intentional about building alliances with business leaders. One of the key openings with business occurred in 2006, when many business leaders became distressed by the toxic local

legislative climate in Nashville, which featured a host of immigrant-unfriendly bills. Over time, TIRRC’s work with business groups moved into a more proactive phase. As TIRRC engaged the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce, it noted that the Chamber responded best to an economic development message. In close partnership with the Coalition for Education about Immigration, TIRRC participated in many presentations to the Chamber’s membership and found that the business community was uncomfortable with the rise in anti-immigrant rhetoric, which it believed was detrimental to the community and to the business climate. TIRRC gained Chamber support by working with them to publically emphasize Nashville’s welcoming and inclusive nature in order to boost tourism and corporate investment. Indeed, Nashville was named the friendliest city in the country by *Travel and Leisure Magazine* in 2010. While TIRRC’s efforts were successful, it is important to note that proactive work is more difficult when so much energy and effort is spent fending off negative measures at the state level. To learn more about TIRRC’s work, visit [www.tnimmigrant.org](http://www.tnimmigrant.org).

In other instances, approaching local business associations for industries that hire immigrant labor is more fruitful. Associations can display a high comfort level with discussing immigrant issues because they are frequently involved in lobbying or other political activity to support policies that favor their industries (e.g., construction, agriculture, meatpacking, hospitality and restaurant business groups).

Another option is to cultivate individual business leaders as one would any leader, looking for individuals willing to go the extra mile for immigrant workers or customers, serve as a bridge to other members of receiving communities, and rally their peers. Businesses guided by strong values and social responsibility may be particularly receptive partners.

In Washington State, for example, the state immigration coalition, OneAmerica, developed a relationship with Joe Fugere, the owner of **Tutta Bella Neapolitan Pizza**, a local pizza chain. Fugere agreed to participate in a pilot project funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Fugere is providing space in his restaurants for computer-based English lessons for his employees, their families, and other members of the community. Fugere has also become an active member of his local chamber and restaurant association so is raising his leadership profile. More about his business and leadership engagement is available at [www.tuttabellapizza.com](http://www.tuttabellapizza.com) and at [blogs.wsj.com/biginnovation/2011/09/09/tutta-bella-neapolitan-pizzeria/](http://blogs.wsj.com/biginnovation/2011/09/09/tutta-bella-neapolitan-pizzeria/).

## Bringing Together Community Leaders to be Catalysts for Change: Fort Morgan, Colorado

Brenda Zion serves as the executive director of OneMorgan County, an immigrant integration effort on the eastern plains of Colorado. OneMorgan successfully brought together immigrants and longer-term members to promote immigrant integration in this agricultural and meatpacking community of 10,000. While their initial focus was on Mexican immigrants, an unexpected influx of Somalis challenged the community to consider how welcoming they truly were and wanted to be. Through dialogues, workshops, and community celebrations, OneMorgan County has made significant strides in bridging the receiving and immigrant communities. Their success is due in part to key local leaders who became involved in the integration effort early on:

- Local reporter Dan Barker who works for the Fort Morgan Times wrote compelling stories about immigrants moving in and the community response. Staff built a relationship with Barker from the onset and kept him regularly informed. He consistently reported on the demographic changes underway and the work of the integration collaborative in a balanced way. Since the local paper is the go-to place for staying abreast of community events, it would have been difficult to overcome a negative media slant. Barker's openness influenced other newspaper staff members to throw their support behind the initiative, though they could have easily highlighted the growing pains the community was experiencing with an influx of newcomers.
- Superintendent of Schools Greg Wagers witnessed marked increases in ethnic diversity within the student population. As demographics changed the make-up of the schools, Wagers navigated those rough waters well. For instance, early on there were concerns about Somalis and their need to pray during the day. Ft. Morgan did not have a history of Islam in the community. Wagers set the stage by being respectful of differences and sharing information broadly. Based on facts, he worked with others to make strategic decisions for the district. For example, he gathered information on how many students would like prayer time, what the impact might be for the classroom, what the existing laws were and how prayers were already incorporated into some events. He faced these emotionally charged issues with a neutral, fact-based approach, and a school prayer resolution was eventually introduced and endorsed by the school board. As one of the largest employers in Ft. Morgan, the district staff and its classroom teachers set the tone for the community in many ways.
- Police Chief Keith Kuretich attended and participated actively in integration events. When rumors around immigrant and refugee crime circulated in the community, he was the first to set the record straight. He was respectful of everyone's rights and allowed his staff time to participate in the integration work. OneMorgan County laid the groundwork and the chief participated in a cultural learning exchange with Denmark through the U.S. State Department to learn, advise and share integration efforts in other contexts. He has demonstrated that local government representatives, including law enforcement, can embrace new initiatives. His credibility as a leader has influenced other community leaders to become engaged in the integration effort.

## *Lessons from a Leader*

Patricia (Pat) Brown, Executive Director of Redwood City 2020 in California, a former elected official, and leader of Redwood City's Welcoming Initiative, describes how active listening influences her leadership style. "My long-term work in conflict resolution taught me how to listen carefully, help people to express their thoughts and feelings, and reconcile interests among many differing points of view. You have to work to find the shared interest among people, but it is almost always there. For instance, if the topic is public safety, people with different opinions can build off of their mutual interest in a safe community and establish agreements around that." Brown often begins talking about immigrants by using Census information and the reality of change. Her approach is to ask others, "In light of this information about demographic changes in our community, could you be supportive of an effort to build bridges to others who might not be fully engaged in our community? Can you help us energize the entire community?" Then the task is to connect with community institutions, faith-based organizations, and neighborhood associations to make this action happen. For Brown, being front-and-center on these issues is easier because she can build on existing, strong relationships in the community. Her community building and strategic planning experiences have given her the opportunity to get to know and work closely with a wide range of people. Together, Redwood City residents have built trust over the years and learned how to discuss controversial issues.

## *Lessons from a Leader*

Mayor John DeStefano, Jr. of New Haven, Connecticut, has enjoyed a long career in city government. He offers advice to practitioners hoping to involve leaders around issues related to immigrants. "Start by emphasizing commonalities when addressing issues. Services and policies shouldn't be aimed at only one group, but rather at supporting the entire community. There is mutual interest in these broad definitions." When New Haven was considering adopting municipal identity cards for all New Haven residents, the conversation focused on what was best for the entire community. Leaders emphasized what people had in common and the goals of general safety, rather than focusing on the safety of certain immigrants. "Part of focusing on our commonalities needs to include emphasizing how our traditional values have served us well. Moving forward, it isn't about developing amnesia about who we are, it's about recognizing that these are America's issues, not just immigrant issues," says DeStefano.

This mayor is quick to explain that when he speaks of immigrants, he is referring to a diverse group that includes visa holders who are studying or working at Yale University, those employed in high tech industries, refugees, and other foreign-born people who live in New Haven, some of whom may not have proper immigration documentation. In developing his policies, he needs to be mindful of the needs of his diverse constituents.

DeStefano considers himself fortunate to govern in a city that is so supportive of civil rights, which gives him significant latitude to explore policy options. As a result, places like New Haven can pursue approaches that may be politically infeasible elsewhere, developing and testing model programs that other communities can learn from. Even so, governing tends to be about problem solving and perhaps less about politics for most mayors. "I am a believer in incremental change. If the broad, sweeping change people are after just isn't possible, break it down into manageable pieces to build smaller successes over time," says DeStefano.



## 5. RESOURCES FROM THE FIELD

Leadership engagement is the area with the fewest number of existing resources for practitioners to draw upon. However, these leadership programs do encourage leaders to become more active on issues related to immigration more generally. Reaching out to the leaders involved in these efforts is a good place to start.

The **Young Elected Officials Network (YEO)** is a program of People for the American Way that works with nearly 700 elected officials across the country, all of whom self-identify as progressives. About 60% are leaders at the municipal/school board level and about 40% at the legislative level. Members must be 35 years of age or younger when they join YEO, though once they join they are welcome to stay indefinitely. YEO focuses on this age cohort because it is when most are first joining the political sphere and tend to be most open to new ideas. YEO provides three types of services: networking; leadership and personal development support; and policy support to connect participants to some of the best thinkers on issues that are important to them.

One of YEO's recent retreats focused jointly on immigration and redistricting. There was a great interest among the YEO officials across the nation in learning more about immigration, finding ways to calm down the rhetoric, and figuring out how to deal with the issues. After the retreat, each leader developed a community action plan based on local conditions and climate, identifying the most practical and promising measures, such as hosting a series of community meetings, and addressing the issue in newsletters to constituents.

YEO Director Andrew Gillum has some advice for engaging leaders on controversial issues:

- Leaders need to be guided by and committed to internal principles of fairness, access and opportunity for them to work long-term on these issues. If they are only engaging on an issue for political expediency, their engagement won't last.
- Even with these core beliefs, the leader needs political courage. Leaders need constituent support and political cover. Letters to the editor, blog postings, and newspaper comments are all important. Leaders don't want to feel completely alone.
- Elected officials need to take a stand on policy issues starting from their strongest arguments. If they start too far in the middle, perhaps in an effort to seem more accommodating, they can cede too much ground early on. They need allies to help them stake out the strongest positions and understand that they need room for compromise.

- With controversial issues, it's always best to emphasize "reasonable, practical" solutions to problems. Communication strategies have to be at their best when engaging around controversial issues.
- It's important to continue to funnel resources, information and talking points to leaders, even if they are initially unreceptive. Thinking and positions may evolve over time. Allow leaders the space to opt in or opt out of an effort around a particular topic, letting them know that while you will not agree on everything, you hope they will try to keep an open mind.

For more information about YEO, visit [www.pfaw.org](http://www.pfaw.org).

Recognizing that elected leaders do not reflect the diversity of the country, either by race, ethnicity or gender, Sayu Bhojwani of **The New American Leaders Project** wanted to help immigrants develop their leadership potential and gain mainstream leadership positions. Bhojwani's program focuses on fostering immigrant leaders to assume key positions in receiving communities, either at the local or state level, so that leadership is more reflective of the communities it serves.

For the past year, The New American Leaders Project has partnered with state-based organizations to recruit local participants who have an interest in a future run for office. Participants are either first- or second-generation immigrants, and are engaged in a two-day training, which is in many ways a candidate development program. After the training, staff continues to follow-up with participants. To date, trainings have been conducted in New York, Illinois and Michigan.

The New American Leaders Project has adapted mainstream training programs and created modules specific to those with an immigrant background. Says Bhojwani, "One of the unique areas we cover is how candidates can best represent their own immigrant background. We discuss the fact that they probably don't want to run on that background, but they certainly don't want to run away from it, either." Several of modules cover how to tell one's American story with the unique elements of the immigrant experience. Participants examine the values that emerge from their own story and try to emphasize those values in a way others can relate to. The immigrant story becomes a pivot point for sharing values with constituents. The program also uses diverse trainers from immigrant backgrounds themselves and with previous candidate development experience. For both trainers and participants, it is unusual to speak openly about their immigrant experiences. Learn more at [www.newamericanleaders.org](http://www.newamericanleaders.org).

## *Opportunities and Challenges for Leadership Engagement*

Having the support of a diverse set of community leaders who represent different constituencies can greatly strengthen the impact of any immigrant integration effort. Below are some issues to bear in mind in planning and sustaining local leadership engagement efforts.

- **Preparation.** When approaching community leaders, always be respectful of their time; come to meetings prepared; fully articulate the purpose, goals and anticipated outcomes of the work in question; and have a clear “ask” for them to respond to.
- **Timing.** The ideal time to engage leaders in this work is as early as possible, before tensions have a chance to fester and escalate. Once the climate becomes more adversarial, it often is more difficult for people to step up and enter the fray. Consider a long-term strategy for building relationships with a diverse core of leaders from the receiving community: it lays the groundwork for more sustainable and meaningful leadership engagement.
- **Ongoing Engagement.** Finding and nurturing supportive leaders can be a time and labor-intensive process. At a minimum, it is critical to keep leaders regularly informed of integration efforts in the community. Even if they never choose to attend a meeting, regular email updates and occasional informational meetings let them know that they are always welcome and that efforts are ongoing. In addition, different approaches are necessary for recruiting different types of leaders. Too often practitioners give up on potential leaders too early in the process or lose touch with them over time.
- **Transition Planning.** Leaders lose elections, retire or move on to new opportunities. There are numerous examples of strong receiving communities efforts that were crippled when their champions moved on. Keeping the work alive and energized means continuously engaging and supporting new and emerging leaders. To the extent possible, efforts need to be institutionalized so that they are not subject to the winds of electoral change. Establish strong public-private partnerships to ensure sustainability.



## **CREATING A COMPREHENSIVE RECEIVING COMMUNITIES EFFORT**

Receiving communities efforts maximize their impact when they incorporate all three of the toolkit’s elements: they build meaningful contact and connections between newcomers and long-term receiving communities members; use smart communication strategies; and strengthen the engagement of leaders from government, business, faith and social service sectors in order to build support with mainstream Americans.

### **1. GETTING STARTED**

Organizations that have not viewed their work through a receiving communities lens before may wonder how to get started. Taking the time to build internal support for a receiving communities approach in the organization and figuring out how such an approach may or may not fit within the existing organizational mission and structure is an important first step. Reaching out and trying to appeal to a larger, ambivalent population is not necessarily suited to every organization. However, for many there will be significant benefits to incorporating receiving communities practices, listening to and learning from the ambivalent, and nurturing a deeper base of support. Indeed, every city or town needs some level of concerted, ongoing effort that engages the mainstream on immigrant issues. Figuring out the right entity or the right set of collaborators to bring together for this purpose is an important way to begin.

For other organizations, incorporating receiving communities work may be a natural extension of existing programming. Considering the scope of services currently offered and how and where receiving communities strategies might be most easily incorporated is probably most feasible, especially without additional funding sources. For instance, if the organization provides English or citizenship classes, incorporating a contact-building strategy that uses native-born volunteers may be relatively simple. If there is an established leadership group within the community, reaching out to them may prove less challenging than starting a new group from scratch. There may also be communication vehicles, such as organizational newsletters or neighborhood newspapers, which could easily incorporate receiving communities content and messages and reach a broader audience.

However, no matter what the receiving communities activity, some up-front communications work related to messaging with receiving communities is warranted, and this may be a different way of communicating than is used with an immigrant or client-based constituency. Whether an organization is new to receiving communities work or already engaged in it, it is critical to provide organizational staff with the training needed to ensure that appropriate messages and modes of interaction are used with different target audiences. Sometimes particular staff members engage in both immigrant and receiving communities outreach work and can handle the distinct demands of working with both audiences. In other instances, dedicated staff handles only the receiving communities outreach. Obviously, senior management will be required to make operational decisions like these. The key take-away for senior management is that those decisions need to be made intentionally and explicitly, not by default.

For those readers who are interested in receiving communities practices as an individual and are not working on behalf of an organization, there are many ways to engage in receiving communities efforts. Looking for other individuals in the community as well as organizations that are positively predisposed and working together to incorporate these practices in an important step. **Friends of Welcoming** is an online platform created by Welcoming America to support individuals that want to make their communities more welcoming. On the site, points are earned for performing welcoming activities such as signing a Welcoming Pledge or organizing a potluck that brings immigrants and non-immigrants together. This is an easy way for individuals to get started in receiving communities work. Visit [www.friendsofwelcoming.org](http://www.friendsofwelcoming.org) to learn more.

## 2. STRENGTHENING RECEIVING COMMUNITIES PRACTICES

Most existing receiving communities efforts incorporate some elements of contact, communications and leadership development work, but few incorporate all three. This toolkit challenges practitioners already using receiving communities concepts to go deeper and strengthen their commitment to engaging mainstream America, especially by adopting a comprehensive approach. That means ensuring that communication strategies are strategic; new leaders identified and engaged; and ongoing, meaningful opportunities exist to strengthen relationships between immigrants and the native born.

As the examples in the toolkit illustrate, there are a growing number of receiving communities activities taking place across the country. However, this is still a relatively new field with modest resources. One area in which receiving communities work would benefit is program evaluation. Not only is evaluation helpful for practitioners who want to ensure their time is well spent, but it also guides decision-making regarding replication and financial resource allocation. Several programs outlined in the toolkit have conducted their own small-scale evaluations, which are important to continue and expand. As receiving communities efforts begin to develop into a broader field, however, establishing a shared understanding of receiving communities indicators and anticipated outcomes is increasingly important. Welcoming America has created a logic model and identified a series of short-, medium- and long-term outcomes for engaging receiving communities that may prove useful in beginning this evaluation conversation.

Currently, many groups report similar implementation lessons, typically learned anecdotally. Sharing these lessons is more important than ever, to preserve resources, avoid mistakes and more effectively influence attitudes and behaviors towards immigrants. And for that sharing to take place, receiving communities practitioners must connect with each other and stay connected. An added benefit of creating connections among providers engaged in this work is support. It is much more challenging and draining to persuade the ambivalent than to collaborate with long-term allies and friends. Building relationships with other receiving communities practitioners pays dividends in terms of peer support, programmatic feedback and long-term movement building and social change.



## LAUNCHING A RECEIVING COMMUNITIES MOVEMENT

Communities across the country are slowly coming to the same conclusion: in order to change the climate for newcomers and address persisting immigrant integration challenges, strategies must be put in place that speak to and engage mainstream Americans in new ways. Long-term, a cultural shift needs to take place so that people recognize their commonalities and work together to address emerging needs in their communities. From engaging faith leaders to telling immigrant stories on the radio, from hosting dialogues around films to sending delegations overseas to learn from sending communities, there is a remarkable amount of work underway that if connected more deliberately, if strengthened, if systematized and brought to scale, has the potential to transform the lives of immigrants and their neighbors across America.

Those places that have created many of the models shared in the toolkit typically have one thing in common: they enjoy some level of financial support, much of it from the foundation community. Daranee Petsod, executive director of Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees (GCIR), a membership organization of foundations that invest in immigrant integration, observes, “Foundations have made investments that have significantly improved the lives of newcomers, and many have also funded innovative approaches to address the concerns of members of receiving communities. That said, there’s so much more to be done to reach out to and engage mainstream America - and to promote a better understanding of the contributions immigrants make to our society’s social, economic, and civic fabric.” Locally, practitioners seeking to adopt receiving communities practices may find that some foundations are more open to funding receiving communities work than funding traditional immigrant services or advocacy. Reaching out to new potential donors to explore their interests in this arena could be very productive.

As a still nascent movement, receiving communities efforts would greatly benefit from additional investment. Indeed, few practitioners feel they are part of a national movement to engage receiving communities members, and many are eager to learn from others who have challenges and successes to share. Most of the people interviewed for this toolkit expressed a deep desire to connect with others, and to stay connected, as their thinking and practices around engaging receiving communities continue to evolve.

The time to launch a national movement to proactively, strategically engage receiving communities has come. Here are some thoughts to guide its development:

- The receiving communities movement must be inspirational and inclusive, inviting many new people in, and challenging those who have worked on immigrant integration and immigrants’ rights for years to try new approaches and consider how to best incorporate a receiving communities strategy into current practice.
- People in the field doing this work already, as well as those considering how to start, need to connect with each other in meaningful ways, both virtually and in-person.
- Government, at all levels, has a strong self-interest in this work and there need to be ongoing strategies for enlisting their support.
- For significant impact to occur, there must be funding resources dedicated to receiving communities efforts. Whether hiring a staff person to manage a cadre of volunteers from receiving communities or working with a communications firm to test messages that resonate with the ambivalent, in order for this type of movement to produce high quality results, there need to be financial resources committed to it.
- Improved evaluation methods need to be developed, so that progress can be charted and those working towards long-term change can recognize when they are, or are not, making a difference. Strong evaluation means incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data collection, and being willing to ask tough, uncomfortable questions in order to improve practice. It also means developing a shared understanding of, and indicators for, receiving communities involvement.
- Engaging receiving communities must be viewed as long-term work. Change will not happen quickly. However, as the examples in this toolkit point out, change is very much possible with intentionality, resources, smart practices, peer support and ongoing feedback.

Despite the fact that many Americans today may not know or understand their new neighbors, there are stories emerging from across the country of everyday people overcoming linguistic and cultural differences to develop a broader sense of community. As America continues to move forward into a new global era, helping people understand their shared humanity and destiny is more important than ever.

This toolkit is only the start of documenting and expanding a growing receiving communities movement. We encourage you to link with others interested in working with a more diverse segment of our community. For more information and to become involved, visit [www.receivingcommunities.org](http://www.receivingcommunities.org).



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Susan Downs-Karkos is Director of Integration Strategies at the Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning in Denver, Colorado, where she leads efforts to strengthen immigrant integration across Colorado and nationally, with a focus on health, education and community building. She also serves as the Director of Colorado Welcome Back, a program assisting foreign trained health professionals in re-establishing careers in health care. Prior to joining Spring Institute in 2008, she worked for more than a decade at The Colorado Trust, a grantmaking foundation. As a senior program officer at The Trust, Downs-Karkos designed and managed the Supporting Immigrant and Refugee Families Initiative, a \$19 million effort that strengthened immigrant-serving organizations and engaged immigrants and members of receiving communities in local immigrant integration efforts. Her earliest work in community building began in 1993 at the National Civic League, where she documented efforts around the nation that brought together diverse sectors and actors to promote healthy and cohesive communities.

Downs-Karkos is a former national board co-chair of Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees (GCIR), and was involved in the creation of GCIR's Immigrant Integration Toolkit in 2006. She was also a member of the national Office of Refugee Resettlement's Integration Working Group. Downs-Karkos has written and spoken widely about the importance of immigrant integration and strategies for promoting it. She holds a BA in psychology from Bates College in Lewiston, Maine.

