

By Ricardo Gambetta and Michelle Burgess

Immigrant Integration: Resource Access and Cultural Exchange

Successful immigrant integration connects immigrants into city and community life. To work, the process requires a supporting framework of community outreach, resource access and education to teach new residents about city services and civic responsibilities. While direct services of assistance or referrals in health care, education, housing, etc. help transition and settle immigrants into an area, resource access strategies of multilingual outreach and availability are equally important in connecting new arrivals with these existing resources. Successful integration also relies on outreach and communication with the established community to build support and cultural understanding. These cultural aspects ensure that all residents work together in community building, recognizing the value of diversity and the importance of integration initiatives. This guide provides examples of programs designed to build this integration framework, ranging from those that provide direct services to those more focused on information and cultural exchanges.

Multilingual Community Outreach Program

Mountain View, California

Population: 70,038

Foreign born: 27,161 (39%)

Contact: Blanca Elsa Cinco, Community Outreach Coordinator, City of Mountain View, (650) 903-6145

blanca.cinco@mountainview.gov

Established in 1998, Mountain View's Multilingual Community Outreach Program provides information on city programs and services to residents who are difficult to reach through traditional communications methods. The program disseminates city and community information in English, Spanish, Chinese and Russian through meetings, special events, annual festivals, translations, interpretation services and telephone and e-mail communication. Additional outreach includes presentations to bilingual parent groups and to adult ESL classes, as well as coordination with the fire department to provide multilingual Community Emergency Response Training and Personal Emergency Preparedness training. Run by only three part-time staff and six dedicated community volunteers, the program receives an average of 50 calls per month and reaches out to an average of 10,000 people per year.

"The program disseminates city and community information in English, Spanish, Chinese and Russian..."



Russian Advisory Board

West Hollywood, California

Population: 35,863

Foreign born: 11,826 (33%)

Contact: Tatyana Rodzinek, Russian Community Outreach Coordinator, City of West Hollywood: Public Safety, (323) 848-6826, trodzinek@weho.org

West Hollywood has the most concentrated Russian-speaking population in the U.S. outside of New York City. In 1995, the city took its first step in reaching out to its Russian-speaking community by creating a position for the Russian Outreach Coordinator in the Public Safety and Community Services Department. The Russian Outreach Coordinator has helped improve relations between the Russian-speaking population and the city through outreach and the translation of important city materials, including recruitment notices, applications, letters, agendas, staff reports and meeting minutes.

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The Russian Outreach Coordinator also acts as the staff liaison to the city’s Russian Advisory Board. Created in 2000, this board consists of 11 Russian-speaking at-large members who advise the City Council on issues relating to the Russian-speaking community. The board meets monthly to discuss Russian community needs and to gain familiarization with the inner workings of city government. Meetings are open to the public and are conducted in both Russian and English with simultaneous or consecutive translation. Community members have the opportunity to present concerns, start dialogues, learn about community events and city services and become involved in program planning.

One of the board’s primary goals focuses on getting new immigrants to participate actively in city civic life. As such, the board is responsible for creating several important programs and events targeting the Russian-speaking community and designed to introduce Russian cultural heritage to the wider community. These programs include a conversation café as well as the Festival of Russian Culture and Arts, an annual event with attendance of 3,000-5,000 Russian and non-Russian speaking visitors.



Performers at West Hollywood’s Festival of Russian Culture and Arts



Office of Multicultural and Religious Affairs

Memphis, Tennessee

Population: 679,052

Foreign born: 37,710 (5.6%)

Contact: Nika Jackson, Manager, City of Memphis, (901) 576-6507, Nika.Jackson@memphistn.gov

The City of Memphis' Office of Multicultural and Religious Affairs connects new citizens to resources and information through community outreach, referral services, advocacy and education. As part of the Division of Public Services and Neighborhoods, the office works to build and strengthen relationships between local government and non-profits. The office also encourages ethnic and religious groups to participate in city life and coordinates with city agencies on language translation services. A recent Spanish and Vietnamese billboard campaign, for example, helped raise awareness about the city's telephone interpretation services.

Outreach programs include various trainings and seminars from local police and non-profit partners as well as a monthly Spanish radio show, "Real Questions, Real Answers," that features city staff and immigration attorneys. The Multicultural Memphis awareness campaign recognizes multicultural community leaders to improve cross cultural understanding. Additional programs include the Mayor's Multicultural Coalition, Muslim Town Hall meetings and "Passport to Partnership" events in specific communities to help them better understand city services and resources.

The City of Memphis is also one of NLC's Municipal Action for Immigrant Integration (MAII) target cities. As part of this collaboration, the city launched a NewCITYzen Naturalization Campaign, a grass-roots effort to encourage immigrants to seek U.S. citizenship. Future collaboration with NLC as well as with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children will result in a planned immigrant youth and child safety training.

"...the city launched a NewCITYzen Naturalization Campaign, a grass-roots effort to encourage immigrants to seek US citizenship."

Images

Greeley, Colorado

Population: 89,622

Foreign born: 10,490 (12%)

Contact: John Pantaleo, Public Information Officer, City of Greeley, (970) 350-9702,

john.pantaleo@greeleygov.com

The City of Greeley uses a monthly talk show, *Images*, to improve relationships within and between diverse sections of the community. Sponsored by the Human Relations Commission and broadcast over the local government access channel, the program has addressed issues including the Holocaust and the local Jewish population, Asian-Pacific rim students, Japanese cultural exchange, Hispanic immigration, Native American culture and the homeless population. In each episode, *Images* provides insight into the

"...*Images* provides insight into the cultural diversity and differences that exist within the Greeley community."

cultural diversity and differences that exist within the Greeley community. The host, city staff and Human Relations Commission members regularly receive positive feedback from residents who have seen and appreciate the show's message and intent.



New Mainers Project

Lewiston, Maine

Population: 35,270

Foreign born: 2,412 (7%)

Contact: Phil Nadeau, Deputy City Administrator, City of Lewiston, (207) 513-3000, pnadeau@lewistonmaine.gov

The City of Lewiston works to educate its Somali residents about American customs and teach its other residents about the traditions of their new neighbors. A full-time immigrant refugee programs manager helps promote cultural understanding and awareness, while the New Mainers planning board helps immigrants find housing and provides interpreters to communicate with Somali community leader.

The New Mainers Refugee Workforce Development Project (NMRWDP), a federally funded earmark program with support from the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment, and Training Administration, addresses employment concerns by providing English instruction as well as cultural and practical skills training to refugees and recent immigrants. NMRWDP operates in both Lewiston and Portland, Maine, as a collaboration between the Lewiston CareerCenter, the Portland CareerCenter, Lewiston Adult Education, Portland Adult Education, Catholic Charities of Maine and the City of Portland Refugee Services. A section for higher-level English speakers provides participants with networking workshops and job counselors, while a section for lower-level English speakers also provides a 140-hour training on American work culture, the job search process and basic computer skills.

The New Mainers Book Project focuses on preserving and celebrating the cultural heritage of Maine's recent immigrants, while also encouraging English literacy. The project collects stories and cultural information from Maine's refugee communities in their own language, translates those stories into English, and turns them into high quality, bilingual books. For example, the book "New Mainers: Portraits of our Immigrant Neighbors" provides photos and interviews of 25 immigrants to share their stories and perspectives with the wider Maine community.

Adopt-a-Mom

Guilford County, North Carolina

Population: 464,041

Foreign born: 39,243 (9%)

Contact: Charmaine Purdum, Guilford County Coalition on Infant Mortality Coordinator, Department of Public Health, (336) 641-6775, cpurdum@co.guilford.nc.us

Sponsored by the Guilford County Coalition on Infant Mortality, Adopt-a-Mom is a prenatal care program for low- and medium-risk pregnant women who have no health insurance or Medicaid. Many of the women served are immigrants who speak limited English. Only 29 percent of participants speak English; 66 percent speak Spanish, and 6 percent speak another language. The program provides mentoring and parenting information as well as physician referrals. Local government agencies and community social services refer patients to the county health department's program coordinator, who then

"As of October 31, 2010, the program had served 4,317 women..."

connects patients to local private obstetricians who have agreed to provide prenatal care at \$400 per patient. As of October 31, 2010, the program had served 4,317 women and involved 17 OB-GYN practices.



Friendly Facts for Living in the Rogers Area

Rogers, Arkansas

Population: 54,405

Foreign born: 9,532 (18%)

Contact: Community Support Center, City of Rogers, (479) 936-5453

<http://www.rogersarkansas.com/friendlyfactsold/index.asp>

Rogers compiled a booklet describing services and agencies in the area. Now available in an online format, this resource provides vital information to new arrivals. Available in both English and Spanish, the online resource explains city ordinances and contains reference information, addresses for emergency personnel and utilities, and a brief history of Rogers. It includes information on public schools, libraries, utilities, citizenship, parks and recreation, instructions for how to obtain building and driver's licenses, resources for public activities, etc. Offered free of charge, this resource helps welcome newcomers into the Rogers community while giving them the tools they need to integrate into the wider community.

Immigrant Welcome Center

Indianapolis, Indiana

Population: 797,886

Foreign born: 54,796 (6.9%)

Contact: Terri Morris Downs, Executive Director, Immigrant Welcome Center, (317) 808-2340,

ttdowns@immigrantwelcomecenter.org

The Immigrant Welcome Center (IWC) connects newcomers to resources, services and opportunities within the City of Indianapolis. Established in 2006, this non-profit organization coordinates referrals with community partners to help acculturate and link new immigrants to services that meet basic needs, including transportation, health care, employment and job training, education and legal issues. The program's funding comes primarily from grants and local family foundations and supports outreach to between 50 and 60 families per year.



Immigrant Welcome Center Natural Helpers Group

The main feature of this outreach involves the Natural Helpers Program, where volunteers who live and work in the community mentor new arrivals one on one. Each of the approximately 65 Natural Helpers is bilingual and has undergone a 28-hour training program. Often, they have themselves navigated the integration process and can offer culturally sensitive advice and guidance.

This past year, IWC also worked with the Indianapolis International Center and NLC's Municipal Action for Immigrant Integration (MAII) program to provide naturalization and citizenship trainings and seminars as part of the city's NewCITYzen Naturalization Campaign. These free naturalization information sessions are held at community centers, libraries and schools across the city and inform immigrants about the requirements for becoming a U.S. citizen, the naturalization process and the rights and responsibilities of U.S. citizenship.



City Links Program

Cambridge, Massachusetts

Population: 106,255

Foreign born: 27,316 (26%)

Contact: Sandra Canas, City Links Coordinator, Cambridge Community Services, (617) 876-5214, scanas@cambridgecommunity.org

Cambridge's City Links program works with linguistic minority youth in an outreach effort designed to integrate them into the community and provide them with the tools they need to become future community leaders. The program serves 20 high school students each year and places them in a 10-hour per week public sector internship. City Links students help with services in translation, program assistance and interpretation in locations such as the Cambridge Police Department, Cambridge Hospital, Cambridge Public Libraries and municipal child care centers. Students receive additional support through a one-on-one mentorship program, counseling on access to higher education, academic tutoring, leadership development, a seminar and guest-speaker series, and volunteer and community advocacy opportunities.

City Links breaks the cycle of unemployment and underemployment among linguistic minorities: 90 percent of the program's graduates attend college compared with about 55 percent of graduates from the city's high school bilingual programs. The program not only gives its participants the opportunity to gain concrete skills and work experience, it also exposes them to public service careers. Over time, this helps increase diversity within city government, as these youth leaders increasingly participate in their community.

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City Links students volunteering at the local senior citizens' center



City Links students discussing a project during their weekly seminar



Project VIDA

El Paso, Texas

Population: 602,672

Foreign born: 154,861 (26%)

Contact: Bill Schlesinger, Co Director, Project VIDA, (915) 533-7057, pvida@whc.net

Since 1990, Project VIDA has been operating from one of the nation's most impoverished neighborhoods in the center of El Paso. Today, Project VIDA serves three neighborhoods and more than 1,500 families. Regular dialogue with the community and assessment of community needs continue to shape program services and has led to an expansion of the program from the original one-room clinic into a multi-faceted center with health care clinics, youth educational programs, GED classes, transitional housing and other community services. In 2010, Project VIDA also introduced a microenterprise initiative focused on Spanish-speaking microenterprise owners. The program provides significant investment in outreach visits, loan access and technical assistance, both in-group and in individual settings. With an annual, citywide investment of about \$100,000, the microenterprise program has demonstrated regular job growth with more than thirty jobs created within the year. The City of El Paso has funded this project for the last three years, while a partnership with ACCION: Texas helped develop the microenterprise technical assistance program.

Aurora Asian/Pacific Community Partnership

Aurora, Colorado

Population: 309,091

Foreign born: 61,556 (20%)

Contact: Frankie Anderson, Secretary/Treasurer, Aurora Asian/Pacific Community Partnership, (303) 326-8695, admin@auroraasian.org

Formed as a collaboration between community organizations and businesses, the Aurora Asian/Pacific Community Partnership organizes community events, business workshops and educational training programs to encourage understanding and collaboration between different groups within the City of Aurora. These efforts include producing and promoting Asian Pacific cultural events as well as assisting Asian Pacific American businesses within Aurora. Projects such as film festivals and cultural performances attract visitors to the city to promote cultural-understanding and, in the process, increase business and tax-based revenue.



Aurora's Gateway to the Rockies Parade



Opening Night of the Aurora Asian Film Festival



Colonias Program

College Station, Texas

Population: 80,972

Foreign born: 10,019 (12%)

Contact: Oscar J. Muñoz, Deputy Director, Center for Housing and Urban Development, (979) 862-2372, omunoz@tamu.edu

The Colonias Program at Texas A&M's College of Architecture is a grant-supported program that works to encourage and facilitate "community self-development" in the unincorporated, poor rural communities (colonias) located along the U.S. side of the U.S.-Mexico border. The program focuses on increasing service access for residents in these areas, most of whom are Hispanic. Nineteen community centers throughout the region serve as distribution points to deliver services and increase access to education, job training, youth and elderly programs and health and human services. In each of these locations, colonia residents are hired, trained and supervised as peer outreach and knowledge resources for their neighbors. Together these centers receive more than 50,000 visits per month.

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About This Publication

The National League of Cities is the nation's oldest and largest organization devoted to strengthening and promoting cities as centers of opportunity, leadership and governance. NLC is a resource and advocate for more 1,600 member cities and the 49 state municipal leagues, representing 19,000 cities and towns and more than 218 million Americans.

Through its Center for Research and Innovation, NLC provides research and analysis on key topics and trends important to cities, creative solutions to improve the quality of life in communities, inspiration and ideas for local officials to use in tackling tough issues and opportunities for city leaders to connect with peers, share experiences and learn about innovative approaches in cities.

NLC's Municipal Action for Immigrant Integration program focuses on promoting civic engagement and naturalization among immigrant communities in cities throughout the United States.

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