

A WELCOMING AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETY.

OVERVIEW

Immigrants and refugees have come to our shores in search of opportunity and freedom. The process of integrating into a new land – to achieve self-sufficiency, political and civic involvement, and social inclusion – can be difficult but the rewards are immense. We need to build a different kind of community– one that embraces immigrants and fosters opportunity for all. Communities around the country and across the globe are recognizing that being welcoming makes them more economically competitive and vibrant places for all residents. Immigrant integration starts at the local level at schools, workplaces, and civic organizations. But they cannot do this alone. We need a robust federal investment in welcoming communities for these efforts to be successful. All level of governments—from federal, to state, to local—have a critical role to play in supporting communities embrace immigrants and foster opportunity for all.

Our nation can create a welcoming climate for immigrants and one suited for successful social integration by:

- Establishing a Federal Office of New Americans and National Immigrant Integration Policy Council
- Supporting local communities in developing plans to institutionalize integration
- Prioritizing social integration through direct service

BACKGROUND

Our success as a nation of immigrants is rooted in the American values of equality and opportunity, and our ongoing commitment to welcoming and integrating newcomers into the fabric of our nation. The impact of successful integration is two-fold: it strengthens the systems and tools that allow immigrants in the U.S. to participate in their jobs and communities, and support their families, while benefiting all Americans by giving immigrants the opportunity to contribute to the vitality of the nation as a whole.

The deepest level of immigrant integration operates at the community level. Successful immigrant integration requires outreach to longtime residents of changing communities and should promote the highest American values of acceptance and equality. National, state, and local policies and programs can encourage mutual respect and cooperation between foreign born and native-born Americans, and create welcoming and supportive communities where all residents can thrive.

The federal government has and can continue to play a unique role in ensuring that communities leverage the competitive advantage that comes from creating a welcoming climate in which immigrants are economically, civically, and linguistically integrated. Ensuring a coordinated response that maximizes resources; leverages interagency and intergovernmental collaboration; and engages both immigrants and receiving communities is vital not only to creating the long-term conditions for successful integration, but to securing a positive future for all Americans.

Every community in the country should have an immigrant integration plan and the federal government should encourage the proliferation of local efforts that are intentional and comprehensive. The federal government has an important role to play in incentivizing and supporting such plans, and ensuring that integration is inclusive of the receiving community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Establish a Federal Office of New Americans and National Immigrant Integration Policy Council

- Many local and state governments have made commitments to immigrant and refugee communities by establishing offices of New Americans, appointing commissioners of those offices, supporting and sharing effective models, and prioritizing immigrant integration policy at every level of government. The federal government must do the same
- The Office of New Americans would drive a national strategy for immigrant integration, and the Council should be an interagency effort to shape and implement effective programs and policies that support immigrants and engage the communities in which they reside
- The National Immigrant Integration Council or Commission should incorporate representation from both New Americans and receiving communities, as well as private sector, local government, and newer gateways, rural communities, etc.

Support local communities in developing plans to institutionalize integration

- Fund and support the creation of local comprehensive welcoming plans with a focus on building meaningful connections between newcomers and long-time residents. Support local governments to communicate positively about the contributions of natives and newcomers alike
- Expand on the recommendations of President Obama's Task Force for New Americans to further strengthen a multi-governmental approach to immigrant integration and provide for continuity of existing efforts and partnerships
- Actively engage faith communities, which have long been vibrant centers of immigrant and refugee integration
- Designate a Promise Zone to act as an integration zone and align integration policies in a place-based model
- Work with Congress to authorize and fund an Integration Success Grant to support and coordinate state and local integration efforts¹

Prioritize social integration through direct service

- To facilitate immigrant integration at the local level, agency resources and support for direct services and receiving community engagement need to be expanded. Direct services such as citizenship workshops, English language instruction, and workforce trainings should be expanded through grants and technical assistance to include the incorporation of innovations around community engagement
- Financial support, training, technical assistance, and recognition should be provided for programs across the federal government and at the state and local levels that help bring newcomers and long-time residents together. This could include prioritizing volunteer programs that do this, or rewarding companies that consciously try to create welcoming workplaces

¹ If enacted, the New American Success Act would do this.