



A teacher leads a citizenship class at Catholic Charities of Southeast Michigan.

Integration Toolkit

Contents

What is immigrant integration? 1

What are some key points to remember about integration? 1

Why is your agency perfect to promote immigrant integration in your community? 2

Role of advocates in immigrant integration 2

Role of local government in integration 3

Examples of Successful Local Government/ Non-Profit Projects Within the CLINIC Network 3

Possible Advocacy Priorities for Your Community 5

Unique local government initiatives that you could encourage in your community 5

What is immigrant integration?

CLINIC uses the following definition, created by Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees:

Immigrant integration is a dynamic, two-way process in which newcomers and the receiving society work together to build secure, vibrant and cohesive communities.

Immigrant integration involves the entire community working together to ensure that everyone, including newcomers, has the opportunity to freely participate in and contribute to the community.

What are some key points to remember about integration?

- Assimilation, acculturation or ‘Americanization’ are not synonyms for immigrant integration. Integration does not mean that newcomers should abandon their native language, cultural practices or belief systems. Integration means that a community’s residents work together to form a new community—one that reflects its residents and their languages, beliefs and needs.



Immigrants in Building One Community's Skills Development Program are trained to work in culinary and home healthcare services, while receiving second language learning support.

- The responsibility for encouraging integration is the responsibility of both newcomers and members of the receiving community.
- Language matters! Make sure to avoid language choices that imply “us,” versus “them.”
- Integration takes time, patience and flexibility. Set expectations early so that community members don’t expect an easy relationship between diverse groups of people immediately.
- Integration requires healthy and strong communication often. Obtain translators, mediators and neutral spaces (libraries, community centers, etc.) to encourage everyone to attend and to allow everyone to participate and contribute their thoughts.
- The most successful integration initiatives are those that directly reflect a local need. Think about what your community needs, and plan initiatives from that starting point.

Why is your agency perfect to promote immigrant integration in your community?

- Your agency is already a trusted place and viewed as safe to the newcomer community.
- Your agency already has a volunteer base and community support, and is trusted by the receiving community.
- Your agency is already engaged in the practice of

welcoming because you offer immigration legal services.

- Newcomers and the receiving community already co-exist as employees and as community members.
- Your agency already offers many services and programs that newcomers and the receiving community can do together.
- Opportunities for sharing and exploring cultures through food, music, worship, sports and other activities already exist through your agency’s events.

Role of advocates in immigrant integration

Advocates give a voice to immigrants who may not be able to speak up for themselves or their needs. Effective advocates develop innovative ways to provide the support needed for both immigrants and long-term residents to adjust to new changes in the environment.

Advocating for immigrant integration policies accomplishes several things:

- Helps newcomers feel welcomed, valued and supported in their new community.
- Allows the established community to benefit from the different skills and cultural practices immigrants bring with them to the United States.
- Sets the tone for your community and lets residents know that your community is a welcoming and accepting place.

- Creates and promotes equal access for all residents to community based resources, such employment health care and education.
- Validates newcomers' needs and concerns and helps them feel more comfortable seeking assistance.
- Teaches newcomers how to navigate the system in place in a community.
- Empowers immigrants to transform and improve their own lives.
- Holds local leaders accountable for ensuring the well-being of all residents, including immigrants.

Role of local government in integration

When local leaders support policies and initiatives that promote integration, they acknowledge the diversity in the community and the need for mutual adaptation by both immigrants and the receiving community. This lets newcomers know that their leaders embrace them and are willing to ensure their well-being.

Public-private collaboration on local immigrant integration initiatives has become increasingly more common. In these arrangements, community partners collaborate with the local government to ensure that new residents have opportunities contribute to the community and access local resources. Local government implements policies—and in some cases spearheads projects—that promote human dignity and build trust between immigrants, leaders and other residents. Local organizations contribute their skills to help the local government implement the policies and maintain these programs.

Here are a few suggestions for how you can get your local government involved in immigrant integration.

- First, identify key issues that impact your immigrant community. What do newcomers need and want? It is important to ask them before planning takes place, as immediate needs might not be obvious or apparent.
- Next, develop an internal plan to address the identified needs. This plan should include relevant personnel, job responsibilities, ways of evaluating the project and how to gain feedback from the newcomer community. It should also include ways to seek guidance and advice from the immigrant community during each phase of the project.
- Once you have a plan, recruit other stakeholders in your community. These can be other local advocates

Examples of Successful Local Government/Non-Profit Projects Within the CLINIC Network

MARCC ID Card

With the help of the city council of Cincinnati, Catholic Charities Southwestern Ohio launched a community ID program so that everyone can have access to community services through an accepted form of identification.

FaithAction ID Card

Based on a strong relationship with the local police department, the development of the FaithAction ID Card demonstrates the power of a collaborative effort between local government and community organizations. This program's model is serving as a national example to other small cities seeking to implement a similar municipal id card in their location.

South Bend Community Resident Card

La Casa De Amistad's resident ID card is an accepted form of identification for many municipal services, and it has high aspirations of expanding to include benefits with local stores and companies.

Littleton Immigration Resources Center

The Littleton Immigrant Resources Center is an award-winning program sponsored by the local government and located within a public library. LIRC connects newcomers with information essential to living within the Littleton and provides immigration legal services

Hartford Public Library

The Hartford Public Library is authorized to provide immigration legal services and offers many other important services to the newcomer community. The library is supported by the community and by the local government.

Coffee with a Cop

Building One Community in Stamford, CT offers monthly conversations with local police officers dedicated to erasing the fear and misunderstanding that often surrounds interactions between police and immigrants. The officers bring snacks and a willingness to openly discuss how they can better help the immigrant community.

Find more CLINIC affiliate integration initiatives at cliniclegal.org/integration.

Contact Leya Speasmaker at lspeasmaker@cliniclegal.org if you'd like your program to be featured.

and leaders in the immigrant community who can help you accomplish your plan. Propose your plan to your city council or mayor and ask how they can help.

- Market the plan to the community in a way that highlights the benefits your proposed plan brings to the community as a whole. Whether it promotes public safety or improves the local economy, your leaders are eager to hear how this improves the community.
- When approaching your local government for help, have your proposal in writing as well as the tools you are bringing to the table to help achieve the goal.
- Consider ways to pay for it. Even if they like it, your local government may not have the resources to pay for the plan you propose. Whether through community fundraisers or grant funding, offer suggestions for ways to pay for it. This lets your leaders know that the community is invested in the project and values immigrants' integration into the community.

For more suggestions on how you can work with your local government to promote and encourage immigrant integration, visit: [cliniclegal.org/resources/promoting-immigrant-integration-ideas-working-together-your-local-officials](https://www.cliniclegal.org/resources/promoting-immigrant-integration-ideas-working-together-your-local-officials).

Importance of Partners in Integration work

When working in your local community, a program is most efficient when it is willing to engage with local programs and government institutions. These external partners can provide increased access to essential materials and offer an opportunity to increase the depth of an organization's understanding.

You can find potential partners in many places, such as:

- Local networks and organizations
- Target community
- Consulates
- Religious organizations
- Social and legal service providers
- Business associations
- Ethnic organizations
- Libraries
- Labor unions
- Local USCIS office
- Quality immigration attorneys and law firms
- Board member affiliations



Signs of strong potential partners

- | | |
|--|--|
| Has expertise in a different area than your organization | Expects a clear division of labor |
| Offers a service to your clients that you don't | Expects a clear understanding of responsibilities |
| Is reliable and organized | Asks for a signed statement of expectations |
| Serves different populations than your agency | Open to regular meetings |
| Has a volunteer pool and a volunteer management plan | Employs regular staff training and quality control |



Red flags in potential partners

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|---|---|
| Has a bad reputation in the community | Hard to reach or don't respond to phone calls or emails |
| Your program has had a past negative experience with this agency | Engaged in the unauthorized practice of law |
| Funders are wary of the organization | Overpromises and under-delivers regularly |
| Doesn't want a coordinated partnership with signed agreements of expectations | |

Possible Advocacy Priorities for Your Community

Driver's licenses and identification cards for all residents

Twelve states and the District of Columbia offer driver's licenses to immigrants. Many local communities across the country have either implemented ID programs or considering doing so. There are many public safety and social benefits to state and local leaders should extend identification cards to immigrants.

More: [cliniclegal.org/resources/forms-identification-undocumented-immigrants](https://www.cliniclegal.org/resources/forms-identification-undocumented-immigrants).

To see whether your state offers driver's license to immigrants visit: [cliniclegal.org/sites/default/files/advocacy/stateandlocal/Drivers-License-Map.pdf](https://www.cliniclegal.org/sites/default/files/advocacy/stateandlocal/Drivers-License-Map.pdf).

Separation of local policing from federal immigration enforcement

There has been an increased pressure upon state and local government to assist or cooperate with federal officials in investigating and detaining immigrants who may be suspected of violating immigration laws. State and local governments' primary focus should be on ensuring the safety and welfare of their constituents. Local resources should go toward paying for critical local needs such as education, community policing and job training programs.

More: [cliniclegal.org/resources/immigration-detainers](https://www.cliniclegal.org/resources/immigration-detainers)

Know your Rights trainings for all community members

All community members, not just newcomers, should be aware of individuals' rights when interacting with law enforcement. Offer trainings to the community on this subject so that everyone can be an advocate for their immigrant neighbors. Community members can be trained on what law enforcement can require of immigrants, what immigrants' rights are when they are undocumented, what to do if ICE comes to a public location (such as a school, church or courthouse) and how best to advocate for newcomers who are not being treated fairly.

More: [cliniclegal.org/resources/know-your-rights](https://www.cliniclegal.org/resources/know-your-rights).

Professional licenses for immigrants

Some states such as California, Florida and Nebraska have implemented new laws and policies to allow immigrants to obtain professional licenses offered in these states. Educated, skilled and young immigrants can fill job demands and add millions of dollars in tax revenues.

More: [cliniclegal.org/resources/professional-licenses-undocumented-immigrants](https://www.cliniclegal.org/resources/professional-licenses-undocumented-immigrants).

Unique local government initiatives that you could encourage in your community

MyCity Academy

This program welcomes new members to the city of Nashville. Over seven months, MyCity Academy participants meet with high level officials and learn about programs that are available to them in their new community. Upon graduation, participants have a better understanding of their home and are able to help their fellow new arrivals. So far, 141 people from 47 countries have graduated, and it shows no sign of slowing down.

Parent Ambassadors

This free program in the City of Nashville links new arrival families to the school systems where their children attend. Twenty-five volunteer parent ambassadors are matched with new arrivals based on country of origin or language. Parent Ambassadors guide new arrivals and advise local school boards on initiatives that would help integrate these new families into the school district.

Mobile Diversity Seminars

This program gives cadet police officers the opportunity to interact with the diverse communities that exist across the city of Nashville. Incoming officers get a chance to understand all the communities they serve and the locals remember a positive first hand experience with the local department.

Spanish-language Driving Classes

This program in Little Rock, Arkansas offers courses in Spanish to people interested in learning local driving laws. Food and child care are offered. Participants receive a course certificate to prove their attendance.

Partnerships with Consulates

Offered in Little Rock, Arkansas and other locations, a mobile consulate allow citizens from various countries to apply for an official passport, register a child's birth with another country and complete other necessary services that can only be completed through an appointment with their consulate.

Municipal ID programs

Several cities already have these in place due to efforts made by CLINIC affiliates, including Greensboro, NC; Cincinnati, OH; and Fort Wayne, IN. Depending on the institution issuing the cards, the IDs can be used to access: healthcare, banking services, local government entities like libraries and public schools. The ID allows people who may not have access to traditional identification to participate more fully in the community.