



The National Partnership for New Americans: Principles of Immigrant Integration

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Immigrant Integration Policy Goals

The National Partnership for New Americans (NPNA) views immigrants as crucial contributors to the social, economic, civic and cultural life of the United States, and a source of the energy, creativity and human resources needed for the country to remain competitive and move forward in an increasingly complex and globalized society. The Partnership believes that immigrant integration is a two-way process that strengthens the systems and tools that allow immigrants in the U.S. to participate fully in their families, jobs and communities, and that benefits all Americans by providing immigrants with the opportunity to contribute fully to those jobs and communities and to the strength of the nation as a whole.

Key goals of federal immigrant integration should include creating effective pathways to lawful permanent resident (LPR) status, facilitating legal permanent residents becoming U.S. citizens, and more broadly supporting the integration of immigrants and their children into the mainstream of our society's economic and civic life. Given the scale and scope of integration issues, the dynamic regional nature of the U.S. economy, and rapidly changing community demographics, a robust and proactive partnership is needed between the federal government and state and local actors, in order to shape and implement effective programs and policies that support immigrants and the communities in which they reside. This includes building meaningful connections between immigrants and long-time residents, and demonstrating the positive contributions that immigrants make to their communities. Immigration integration, in short, needs to be recognized as an overarching public policy issue that requires robust, formal mechanisms to coordinate policies and programs both across federal agencies and with state and local governments.

A National Office on Immigrant Immigration Policy

For these reasons, Congress should create and fund a National Office on Immigrant Immigration Policy within the Executive Office of the President. This Office should drive a national strategy for immigrant integration by: establishing a federal agency framework of integration goals and indicators; coordinating a bi-annual consultation process with state and local governments to inform federal integration policy, program and funding priorities; and coordinating analysis of integration-related data and policy options of immigration proposals or new proposals affecting key integration service areas such as early childhood,

elementary and secondary education, adult basic education and English instruction, workforce training and healthcare, to determine their impact on the successful integration of immigrants and their children.

NPNA Principles of Immigrant Integration

In support of these broad goals and the work of such a National Office, NPNA advances six principles that we believe provide the foundation for a robust and comprehensive policy for immigrant integration. The principles are presented below first in summary form, then in an extended statement that offers more detailed background and policy recommendations.

Summary of Principles

- 1. Strengthen pathways to naturalization and full civic participation for legal permanent residents.** Nationwide, while more than 1 million immigrants achieved legal permanent resident status in 2011, fewer than 700,000 legal permanent residents successfully naturalized during that time. Immigrants who obtain U.S. citizenship gain a wide range of benefits for themselves and their families. Yet the process of naturalization itself includes significant costs and complications that hamper applications by eligible immigrants and discourages others from applying in the first place. NPNA calls for simplifying and streamlining this process and supporting public efforts to reach out to and assist immigrants who want to naturalize, including vulnerable elderly and disabled legal permanent residents.
- 2. Create opportunities for immigrants to receive English Literacy, Civic Education and Continuing Education.** English language skills represent one of the keys to educational and employment opportunity for immigrants, as well as to their full social and civic participation in U.S. life. Yet in 2010, more than half the immigrants in the United States ages five and older were limited English proficient (LEP). Federal and state funding for ESOL programs has shrunk even as demand has increased; waiting lists for classes can be months and even years. NPNA promotes proactive policies and increased funding to integrate immigrants into their communities through English language, civic education, and continuing education as means to strengthen communities, integrate new Americans and encourage civic participation.
- 3. Expand immigrant access to labor markets and economic opportunity through strengthening workforce development, professional integration and immigrant entrepreneurship:** Immigrants are currently 13% of the U.S. population but constitute 16% percent of the civilian labor force, working in all areas of the economy. Between 2002 and 2012 more than half of the growth in the

entire U.S. labor force was due to immigrants. Immigrants are twice as likely as native born residents to start businesses, and immigrant entrepreneurs have founded or co-founded 40% of current Fortune 500 companies. Access to labor markets and opportunities for economic advancement remain among the strongest tools for immigrant integration and a source of benefit to the national economy as a whole. Yet too many immigrants are employed in lower wage and often dangerous jobs and others are unable to work at a level that reflects their home country education and skills. NPNA calls for expanded public and private sector efforts to promote the access of immigrants to family-sustaining employment and opportunities for economic and social mobility.

4. **Ensure that immigrants receive equitable access to services.** Immigrants make up 13% of the population of the U.S., and children residing with at least one immigrant parent accounted for almost one-quarter (24%) of children under age 18 in 2010. Moreover, some 86% of all children with immigrant parents in the United States were U.S. citizens by birth. To promote the best interests of children, (including U.S. citizen children) and ensure healthy families and communities, immigrant and mixed-status families should be eligible for all means-tested federal benefits, including healthcare, food stamps, housing and cash assistance.
5. **Improve access to early education and care that secures a strong future for children in immigrant and mixed-status families.** More than one in four children under age 6 lives in a household that speaks a language other than English. Yet data suggest that dual language learners and children of immigrants are significantly less likely than other children to participate in early education programs. In order to address equity issues, close the opportunity gap, and improve outcomes for children in immigrant and refugee families, a focus on early learning for these children is essential.
6. **Support communities in creating a welcoming climate for immigrants and their successful integration.** The deepest level of immigrant integration—and some of the most serious challenges to this process—operate at the community level. Successful immigrant integration requires at once outreach to U.S.-born Americans with fears about their changing communities and helping communities live up to the highest American values of acceptance and equality. NPNA joins organizations such as Welcoming America in calling for national, state, and local policies and programs that encourage mutual respect and cooperation between foreign-born and U.S.-born Americans, and create welcoming, supportive, and economically vibrant communities where both immigrants and native-born residents can thrive.

Principles and Policy Recommendations

- 1. Strengthen pathways to naturalization and full civic participation for legal permanent residents.** Nationwide, while more than 1 million immigrants achieved legal permanent resident status in 2011,¹ fewer than 700,000 legal permanent residents successfully naturalized during that time.² Immigrants who obtain U.S. citizenship gain a wide range of benefits for themselves and their families, including the ability to vote, shorter wait times for family immigration visas, citizenship for minor children, access to certain federal jobs and various other government benefits, and protection from deportation. Gaining citizenship is also associated with higher earnings and lower poverty levels, and in turn economic gains for all Americans.³ Yet the process of naturalization itself includes significant costs and complications that hamper applications of potentially eligible immigrants and discourage many others from applying in the first place. Strategies to strengthen citizenship pathways and accrue civic, social and economic benefits to immigrants and the country include:
 - Supporting and expanding the USCIS Office of Citizenship's efforts to encourage and assist immigrants to acquire citizenship. These efforts include the Citizenship and Integration initiative that provides competitive grants to non-profit partners to reach out to legal permanent resident immigrants and assist them with their citizenship applications, and a Citizenship Public Education and Awareness Initiative that uses advertising and the Internet to make immigrants more aware of the citizenship application process and the rights and responsibilities that come with citizenship. The agency also offers online instructional resources to assist immigrants and educators with the citizenship test.⁴ Additional USCIS efforts could include outreach to receiving communities to support the efforts of legal permanent residents to naturalize.
 - Working to reduce the sharp increases in fees charged by USCIS over the past decade, which have been needed to offset reductions in Congressional appropriations for USCIS operations. These fee increases have been a major obstacle for eligible LPRs to overcome in applying for citizenship. Congress should increase appropriations to USCIS, allowing the agency to reduce fees and expand waiver programs for applicants based on financial need.

¹ Office of Immigration Statistics (2012). *2011 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*. Washington, DC: Office of Immigration Statistics, Department of Homeland Security, p. 6.

² *Ibid.*, p. 52.

³ Madeleine Sumption & Sarah Flamm (2012). *The Economic Value of Citizenship for Immigrants in the United States*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.

⁴ See the USCIS Citizenship Resource Center web page at <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/citizenship>.

- Work to protect the needs of vulnerable elderly and medically-handicapped legal permanent residents who face special challenges in preparing for naturalization and accessing USCIS services. Congress should pass legislation (such as HR2597, introduced in the last Congress) expanding English language exemptions for elderly legal permanent residents regardless of length of residency. USCIS should simplify and expand procedures for requesting medical exemptions to ensure that all eligible legal permanent residents are able to become citizens regardless of medical disabilities.

2. **Create opportunities for immigrants to receive English Literacy, Civic Education and Continuing Education.** English language skills represent one of the keys to educational and employment opportunity for immigrants, as well as to their full social and civic participation in U.S. life. Yet in 2010, more than half the immigrants in the United States ages five and older were limited English proficient (LEP)—i.e., they speak English less than “very well.”⁵ Federal and state funding for ESOL programs has shrunk even as demand has increased; waiting lists for classes can be months and even years.⁶ Low-literate LEP parents with young children, many of whom are entering school with significant risk factors, can especially benefit from efforts to invest in their language and literacy skills and support their engagement in their children’s early educational experiences. 25 percent of children of immigrants have parents with less than high school degrees, while one of the most predictive indicators of a child’s academic success is the mother’s educational attainment. NPNA seeks leadership and proactive policies and increased funding at the federal level to support the integration of immigrants into their communities through English language, civic education, parent engagement initiatives, and continuing education as means to strengthen communities, integrate new Americans and encourage civic participation.

English language learning should encompass all levels of learning, including support for digital literacy, with contextualized content leading to employment opportunities, improved access to continuing education, and stronger pathways to citizenship. Support for workplace, community-based, and community college instruction is essential. Quality and access should both be prioritized, with opportunities for diverse learners in the community, at the workplace, at schools and early learning centers, and at the community college level. To advance these goals, NPNA calls on policy makers to:

⁵ Migration Policy Institute Fact Sheet, based on data from US Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey (ACS) (<http://www.migrationinformation.org/datahub/state2.cfm?ID=US>).

⁶ Tucker, J.T. (2006). *The ESL Logjam: Waiting Times for Adult ESL Classes and the Impact on English Learners*. Los Angeles, CA: The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund.

- Support legislative changes to Title II of the Workforce Investment Act (The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act of 1998) to substantially increase investment in integrated English literacy, U.S. history, and civics education programs for new Americans in the United States to help such learners progress in the naturalization process and acquire the skills and knowledge to become more active and informed parents, workers, and community members. This includes tax credits for employer-provided adult literacy and basic education programs in the workplace.⁷
 - Strengthen other funding at the federal and state level for ESOL and adult basic education programs for limited English-proficient adults at all educational levels, including contextualized programs that emphasize vocational and professional English, as well as “soft” workplace skills and cultural orientation.
 - Expand opportunities for low-literate LEP parents with young children to build their literacy and parenting skills, creating a continuum of service models that extends across children’s 0-8 years to help support parents in preparing at-risk children for kindergarten and future school success.
3. **Expand immigrant access to labor markets and economic opportunity through strengthening workforce development, professional integration and immigrant entrepreneurship:** Immigrants are currently 13% of the U.S. population but constitute 16% percent of the civilian labor force, working in all areas of the economy. Between 2002 and 2012 more than half of the growth in the entire U.S. labor force was due to immigrants.⁸ Immigrants are twice as likely as native born residents to start businesses,⁹ and immigrant entrepreneurs have founded or co-founded 40% of current Fortune 500 companies.¹⁰

Access to labor markets and opportunities for economic advancement remain among the strongest tools for immigrant integration and a source of benefit to the national economy as a whole, especially given the looming retirement of many older native-born workers. Yet a disproportionate share of immigrants is employed in

⁷ Compare Senate Bill 1478 (2009), introduced by Senators Gillibrand, Alexander and Reid (<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-111s1478is/pdf/BILLS-111s1478is.pdf>).

⁸ Denhart, M. (2012). *Growth and Immigration: A Handbook of Vital Immigration and Economic Growth Statistics*. Dallas, TX: George W. Bush Institute. (Figures based on U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey: 2012 Annual Social and Economic Supplement.)

⁹ Fairlie, R.W. (2012). *Open for Business: How Immigrants are Driving Small Business Creation in the United States*. Washington, DC: Partnership for a New American Economy.

¹⁰ Partnership for a New American Economy (2011). *The “New American” Fortune 500*. Washington, DC: Partnership for a New American Economy.

lower wage and often dangerous jobs, and others are unable to work at a level that reflects their home country education and professional attainment. Barriers facing immigrant workers in this respect can include educational background, poor English skills, limited job networks, lack of computer skills, lack of familiarity with U.S. labor market mechanisms and work culture, and the reluctance of employers to hire immigrant workers. Expanding the access of immigrants to family-sustaining employment and opportunities for economic and social mobility includes support for the following policy directions:

- Increase the access of immigrant students and workers to educational and career pathways that lead to access to stable, better-paying jobs in high demand occupations with opportunities for economic advancement. This includes expanding funding for existing federal and state workforce training and higher education programs that successfully serve at-risk immigrant and LEP individuals, and supporting public/private workforce training partnerships with regional industries and higher education providers that seek to align educational and training opportunities with the needs of regional employers.
- Develop federal and state policies to promote the professional integration of skilled immigrants and professionals, including a national streamlined system for transferring credentials and re-licensing, assisting skilled immigrants acquire certifications and meet additional educational and/or job experience requirements, and helping them navigate complex and uncertain pathways to continuing their professions.
- Work with professional organizations, businesses, non-profits, and immigrant-serving organizations to advance and design policies and create new tools and institutions that most effectively serve the needs of both skilled immigrants and US labor markets.
- Work with federal and state policy makers as well as financial institutions, business interest, non-profits, and educational institutions to strengthen opportunities for immigrant entrepreneurs to start and expand businesses, create jobs, and support their families and communities. This includes: expanding the availability of Small Business Administration benefits to immigrant business owners, including legal permanent residents who are not citizens; reducing barriers to lending and expanding the capital resources available to immigrant entrepreneurs; and providing additional training and technical support to immigrants who want to open or expand businesses.
- Strengthen workplace and occupational protections that impact immigrant workers, especially those in low-skilled occupations, including fair wage laws,

occupational safety regulations, and the right to unionization and collective bargaining.

Implementation of services to immigrants should be a national priority with local workforce leadership and services reflecting community demographics.

4. **Ensure that immigrants receive equitable access to services.** Immigrants make up 13% of the population of the U.S., and children residing with at least one immigrant parent accounted for almost one-quarter (24%) of children under age 18 in 2010. Moreover, some 86% of all children with immigrant parents in the United States were U.S. citizens by birth.¹¹ To promote the best interests of children, including U.S. citizen children, immigrant and mixed-status families should therefore be eligible for all means-tested federal benefits, including healthcare and food stamps. To achieve these ends, policymakers and federal and state agencies must:

- Vigorously enforce Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, specifically Executive Order 13166 directing all government agencies to issue LEP guidance.
- Commit to federal agency worker training on immigrant eligibility, public charge rules, privacy protections, and other issues affecting immigrant participation in benefits, activities and services; and provide new guidance for USCIS officers on public charge so that individuals receiving food and medical benefits are not subjected to the public charge test required for those receiving cash assistance.
- Eliminate the five-year bar to allow all immigrants who are legal permanent residents and are paying taxes into the system to receive federally funded benefits (e.g., healthcare coverage, food and cash assistance, housing) if they meet income and other requirements.
- Ensure that all authorized immigrants, including those eligible for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, fall into the status of “lawfully present” for purposes of the Affordable Care Act, allowing them to purchase insurance inside of regulated exchanges, apply for federal tax credits and enroll in a Basic Health Plan, should their state be able to provide one, while also requiring them to have health insurance under the individual mandate.

Simplification of benefits eligibility determinations will assist federal and state agency staff and policy makers to educate the immigrant community on public programs and efficiently manage those programs and will reduce the rate of “churning” in and out of public benefits eligibility, thereby promoting healthy

¹¹ Migration Policy Institute Fact Sheet, based on data from US Census Bureau, 2010 American Community Survey (ACS) (<http://www.migrationinformation.org/datahub/state.cfm?ID=US>).

families and communities. In addition, ensuring language access to these programs will allow all eligible applicants to receive proper assistance.

5. **Improved access to early education and care that secures a strong future for children in immigrant and mixed-status families.** More than one in four children under age 6 lives in a household that speaks a language other than English. Yet data suggest that dual language learners and children of immigrants are significantly less likely than other children to participate in early education programs.¹² In order to address equity issues, close the opportunity gap, and improve outcomes for children in immigrant and refugee families, a focus on early learning for these children and meaningful engagement of their parents is essential. Extensive research has shown that early childhood education can positively influence cognitive skills, academic achievement, educational attainment and social behavior. Quality early learning programs can help bridge gaps in school readiness, as well as influence long-term outcomes for children in low-income and minority families. Moreover, early education serves as a locus of integration for an entire immigrant family, assisting immigrant parents to connect with language and literacy learning opportunities and other community resources, receive encouragement to become involved in a child's education, and achieve greater community participation, confidence and opportunities to practice English. The NPNA calls for policy makers at the federal and state level to:

- Strengthen funding for the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant to states, in order to improve quality and expand access to early learning programs for dual language learners in particular, including access for educators whose home language is not English and support for high needs children who are dual language learners.
- Call for the reauthorization of Head Start in 2013, maintaining the additional \$2.1 billion invested under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, and including proposed directives to improve outreach to nontraditional populations and better training of teachers and aides to support immigrant and dual language learner families.

6. **Support communities in creating a welcoming climate for immigrants and their successful integration.** The deepest level of immigrant integration—and some of the most serious challenges to this process—operate at the community level. Successful immigrant integration requires at once outreach to U.S.-born

¹² Matthews, H. & Ewen, D. (2010). *Early Education Programs and Children of Immigrants: Learning Each Other's Language*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

Americans with fears about their changing communities and promoting the highest American values of acceptance and equality. NPNA joins initiatives such as Welcoming America in calling for national, state, and local policies and programs that encourage mutual respect and cooperation between foreign-born and U.S.-born Americans, and create welcoming and supportive communities where both immigrants and native-born residents can thrive. NPNA policy recommendations include:

- Promote local community engagement, by funding the creation of new and supporting existing local councils or integration intermediaries at the state or local level to collaborate across sectors to foster a positive and welcoming climate, with a focus on building meaningful connections between newer immigrants and long-time residents; communicating positively about the contributions of natives and newcomers alike; and engaging leaders from all sectors of the community.
- Incorporate receiving communities approaches into direct service provision. Direct services such as citizenship, English language instruction, and workforce services should be expanded through grants and technical assistance to include the incorporation of innovations around receiving community engagement. USCIS, for example, has revised its agency RFPs to prioritize community engagement, and has provided preliminary training to grantees on promising practices in community engagement. The Office of Refugee Resettlement now provides technical assistance to refugee service providers around fostering community support and engagement. Similar initiatives could be undertaken within all agencies tasked with achieving immigrant integration objectives.
- Prioritize contact-building strategies. 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. Specific strategies could include prioritizing CNCS volunteerism programs that bring immigrants and long-time residents together in service to the community, or HUD programs that serve the agency's objective of Building Inclusive and Sustainable Communities Free from Discrimination. Finally, new incentives in federal and state government contracting should reward companies that consciously try to create welcoming workplaces.

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