

The Sustainable Communities Initiative



EQUITY IN SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES ISSUE BRIEFS



EQUITY ISSUE BRIEF

Immigrant Integration: Integrating New Americans and Building Sustainable Communities

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Introduction

When Somali refugees began moving into Lewiston, Maine in 2001, few welcomed them – but a decade later, the town’s revitalization is now pegged to their presence. The once bustling mill town had decayed from its heights, with some calling the center of town a “combat zone.” But an increasing immigrant presence and accompanying commerce has resulted in higher per capita income, less crime and, in 2004, Lewiston was named one of the best places to do business in America by Inc. Magazine. In a town losing population, aging, and struggling to keep up with the economy, immigrants were key to sustainability – particularly for the long-time, native residents.¹

The United States is often regarded as a nation of immigrants. The ongoing arrival of immigrants from across the globe and their integration into our communities strengthen the fabric of American society. In the past, most immigrants arrived first to major urban regions and then moved to suburban locales – a process called “spatial assimilation.”² Today, immigrants are increasingly arriving both to “new immigrant gateways”³ as well directly to smaller, suburban areas within established metropolitan regions, neither of which have longstanding traditions of foreign-born residents. As immigrants settle, they contribute to regional growth in terms of population and, as research is starting to show, in economic and environmental sustainability as well. Indeed, immigrants are not just passing through our metro areas but rather constituting a new foundation for metropolitan America – and how immigrants in our communities fare determines how we will all fare as a nation.

How, then, do we promote successful immigrant integration? First, we need to agree on what we mean – and we define immigrant integration as improved economic mobility for, enhanced civic participation by, and receiving society openness to immigrants, their families and their communities. This implies that integration is a two-way process that requires the participation and transformation of immigrant newcomers and the host communities in which they settle – and highlights that the successful economic, civic, and social participation of immigrants in American life largely depends on mutual involvement and adaption of both U.S.-born and immigrant residents.⁴

These tenets of immigrant integration are parallel to three core values of American society: opportunity, democracy, and openness. *Opportunity* brings economic mobility and is related to job and workforce development, transportation, and licensing credentials; *democracy* allows for civic engagement and is related to naturalization, English language acquisition, and involvement in local decisions; and *openness* is reflected by the warmth of welcome and host society attitudes and policies towards immigrants. Principles for immigrant integration stem directly from traditional American values.

Everyone can help with immigrant integration – from neighbors to labor unions, neighborhood councils, business organizations, and school parent teacher associations. Regional governments, such as metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), can help foster mobility, participation, and openness by acting as conveners of conversations around immigrant integration and mapping the landscapes of labor, housing, and transportation in ways that are inclusive of immigrant concerns and aspirations. MPOs are but one part of a broader ecosystem of regional civic leaders that can work with local governmental agencies, mayors and mayor’s commissions, policymakers, advocacy organizations, non-profit service organizations and community foundations, among others to better welcome immigrants. Such leaders can also help other regional actors (such as businesses and law enforcement) realize that they, too, have a role in promoting immigrant integration as part of a broader vision of building equitable, inclusive societies.

While the issue is important and timely, immigrant integration is an emerging policy arena for regional and local governments – and because the field is still in its infancy, their specific roles are not clearly defined.⁵ In this brief, we offer suggestions that can apply to local and regional leaders as well as governmental and non-governmental groups and we consider the role of MPOs because these organizations are generally linked most directly to the planning and transportation functions of a region. It is useful to cast the initial net widely in looking for best practices; after all, some of the best immigrant integration programs in the country were initially jump-started not by government but through the regional leadership of community foundations such as the Silicon Valley Community Foundation and the Colorado Trust.⁶

We begin this brief with a profile of who the immigrants are in this country, including major demographic changes in immigrant composition over the last few decades, and shifts in the places where immigrants are tending to settle in the twenty-first century. We then place the immigrant integration opportunity in the broader context of a country that is changing in terms of its racial and ethnic make-up, economic structure, and civic institutions; along the way, we stress how immigrants can contribute to economic vitality and environmental sustainability. We then provide recommendations for local agencies to better incorporate

diverse immigrant communities into planning and other processes that make our regions run. Throughout, we offer examples of real steps that local governments across the country are currently taking to help integrate immigrants into their regions.

Immigrant integration is a common effort that can benefit everyone, immigrant and U.S.-born alike, and sustains our nation’s economy and society. The immigrant integration framework is one that resonates with our deepest values of economic mobility, democratic participation and openness to people and ideas. Immigrant integration makes good neighbors friendlier, cohesive communities stronger, and growing regions more sustainable.

Background

Who are the immigrants?

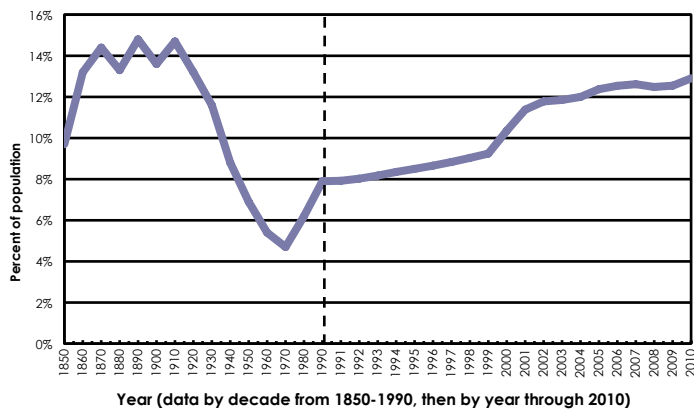
Immigrants have long played a role – an ever-changing one – in the culture and economy of the United States. During the past 150 years, the flows of immigrants have shifted as have the countries from which they come, and the places in which they settle.

Today, there are 40 million immigrants residing in the United States.⁷ The graph on the right depicts two general patterns of upward growth of the immigrant population (see Figure 1). The second, and most recent, began in 1965, during which time the overall limits on immigration were loosened and the country quotas changed, resulting in a more diverse immigrant population.⁸ Although the number of immigrants has trended upward during the past half century, the growth rate has slowed recently. During the past decade, the immigrant share of the population has remained steady, at around 12 percent of the population.

The slowdown in the growth rate means that in many communities, immigrants are not so much newcomers, but more often the well-settled: seven in 10 immigrants have resided in the United States for over a decade and four in 10 immigrants have been in the United States for over 20 years (just 31 percent of immigrants arrived during the previous decade).⁹

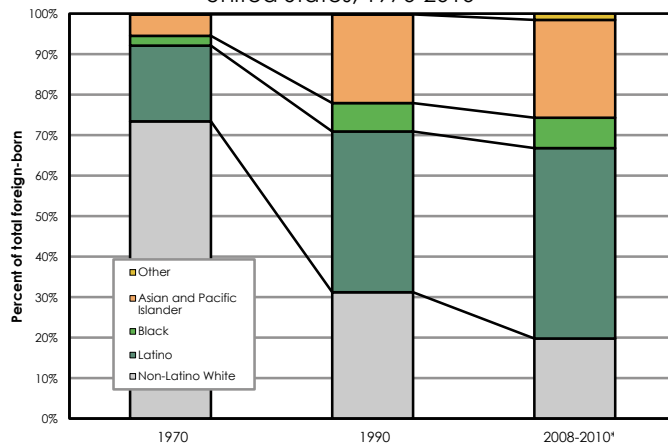
A panoply of countries and unique cultures represent contemporary immigration. Between 1970 and the present, the ratio of white to non-white immigrants flip-flopped: in 1970, non-Latino white immigrants accounted for over 70 percent of immigrants, but now they account for 20 percent (see Figure 2). Today, immigrants in the United States hail from geographically, culturally, and linguistically diverse regions. Not surprisingly, our neighbors – Canada and Mexico – continue to be among the top sending countries, but increasingly immigrants are coming from Asian countries, such as the Philippines, India, and China (see Figure 3).

Figure 1. Percent of Population Foreign-Born
United States, 1850-2010



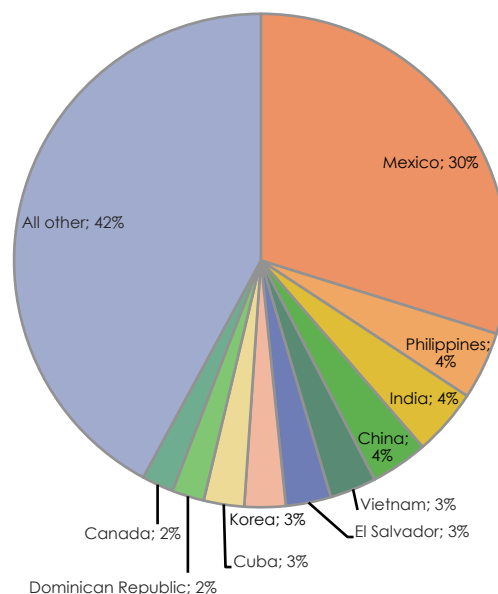
Sources: Angela Glover Blackwell, Stewart Kwoh and Manuel Pastor, *Uncommon Common Ground: Race and America's Future* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010). PERE updated analysis using 2007-2010 IPUMS ACS (individual years used in calculation).

Figure 2. Changing Racial Composition of Foreign-Born
United States, 1970-2010*



Sources: Blackwell, Kwoh and Pastor, *Uncommon Common Ground: Race and America's Future*, 2010. PERE updated analysis using 2008-2010 IPUMS ACS.

Figure 3. Country of Origin of Foreign-Born
United States, 2008-2010



Source: PERE analysis of 2008-2010 IPUMS ACS.

Although not among the top senders, the number of immigrants from some African countries, such as Ghana and Ethiopia, has sharply grown during the past decade.¹⁰

Immigrants are a slightly older population, with a median age of 41, as compared to 35 for U.S.-born.¹¹ The gap makes sense – it’s an older population because they have to be of age to have made the decision to migrate to the United States for work or refuge. At the same time, recent immigrants are generally younger than long-term immigrants, and thus in prime working and family formation age (which is why the children of immigrants are one of the main drivers in the ongoing demographic changes in the United States). Labor force participation rates among immigrants are similar to non-immigrants, although this varies by gender: rates of participation among immigrant men exceed that of U.S.-born men, while rates among immigrant women are lower compared to U.S.-born women.¹²

A Bifurcated Labor Force

The educational attainment of working-age immigrants (ages 25-64) is high at both ends of the spectrum, with just over 30 percent with less than a high school degree and just under 30 percent with a bachelor’s degree or higher (although degree recognition and credentialing issues often present roadblocks for immigrants educated outside the U.S.).

Source: PERE analysis of 2008-2010 IPUMS ACS.

Immigrants are deeply embedded within the American economy, found across sectors and occupations, and as entrepreneurs – making them some of the key drivers of small business development.¹³

Immigrants are also deeply embedded in our housing market and rooted in our communities. Many immigrants have sought and realized the American dream of homeownership, with rates of immigrant homeownership increasing with years of tenure in the United States, eventually surpassing U.S.-born rates of ownership (see Figure 4). After the foreclosure crisis, as the nation looks to fill vacant homes, immigrants may be one of the key groups to help achieve that goal.

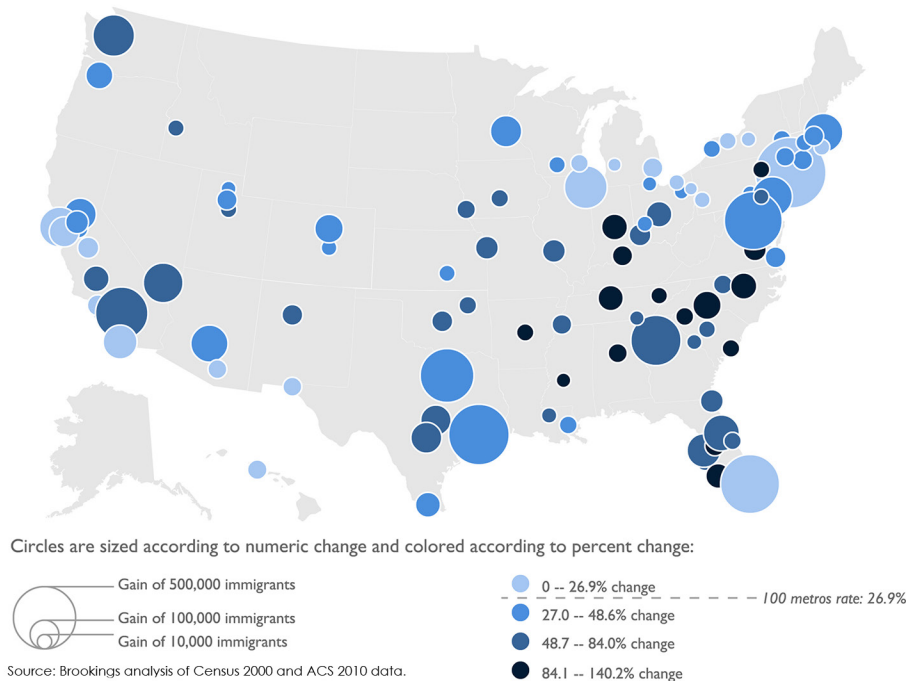
Figure 4. Percent Homeownership by Group
United States, 2008-2010

Percent Homeownership by:

U.S. Born	68.0%
Long-term immigrant	73.4%
Migrated 21 to 30 years ago	60.1%
Migrated 11 to 20 years ago	48.1%
Migrated last 10 years	24.1%

Source: PERE analysis of 2008-2010 IPUMS ACS.

Figure 5. Change in Immigrant Population in the Largest 100 Metro Areas
Numeric and percent change in immigrant population, 2000 through 2010



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Source: Jill Wilson and Audrey Singer, *Immigrants in 2010 Metropolitan America: A Decade of Change* (Washington DC: The Brookings Institution, 2011), <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2011/10/13-immigration-wilson-singer>.

Although homeownership and other measures suggest the emergence, particularly over time, of a solid immigrant middle class, many immigrant households, often those most recently arrived, struggle with poverty and are in need of policies which pave a clear path to the middle class. A greater share of immigrants lives below 150 percent of the Federal Poverty Line (30 percent) than U.S.-born residents (22 percent). They are also more likely to be among the working poor (working full-time yet living below 150 percent of the Federal Poverty Line) than their U.S.-born counterparts.¹⁴

Where are immigrants?

During the past 20 years, the places where immigrants are settling have shifted. They are choosing to reside across the United States, and more often bypassing the central city to settle in small cities, towns and increasingly in the suburbs, where they often find jobs and relatively affordable housing. Although,

overall national immigration rates have slightly ebbed, some central and southern states have experienced pronounced immigration growth – more than doubling in some states with little, if any, prior experience with immigrants.

States and regions where immigration is relatively new or re-emerging – and sometimes growing faster than the national average – are often categorized as “new destinations”¹⁵ or “twenty-first century immigrant gateways.”¹⁶ States such as Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, South Dakota, and South and North Carolina are among the new destination states,¹⁷ as are a growing number of small cities and suburbs across the United States.¹⁸ Among the metros with quickly growing immigrant populations during the past decade are Baltimore, Atlanta, Las Vegas, and Orlando (see Figure 5).¹⁹ Because immigration is relatively new or re-emerging in these places, it is expected that integration efforts are especially needed in order to understand new immigrant populations and connect them as members of the community.

Contemporary Issues

Nation’s Demographic Transformation

Related to the changing demography and geography of immigrants, are the overall patterns of demographic change within the United States. Previously a white majority with significant black and immigrant pockets in gateway cities like Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York City, the United States is increasingly becoming a world nation. Immigrants are dispersing across the country into places with little previous diversity, and people of color are rapidly becoming the majority of the population in urban centers. Today’s 30-year-olds will see the seismic shift in the national racial makeup within their lifetimes: about the time they were born, 80 percent of Americans were white, but by the year 2042, less than half of the population will be white and the country will be a majority people-of-color nation.²⁰

In the past decade, almost all of the net U.S. population growth – 92 percent – came from people of color. Latinos largely drove that increase with the majority coming from new births by Latino residents, but many are the children of immigrants. Among the largest 100 metropolitan regions, the white population declined in two of every five of them, but the Latino population increased in all of them, and the Asian American population increased in all but a handful of metropolitan regions.²¹

Although immigration is not the driver of these national demographic changes – flows of migrants to the United States have been falling and net migration from Mexico, for example, is now zero²² – immigrants are intertwined with this shift through their U.S.-born children. Because of this, how the country will fare in the future depends on how the fortunes of immigrants and their families – and more generally, the fate of communities of color. It is this increasingly diverse population that will lead us into the next economy.

Regional Economic Sustainability

One reason for metropolitan regions to be concerned about successful immigrant integration is the relationship between immigrant presence and a healthy economy. The chart below shows the relationship between the rise in the percent of the immigrant population and employment growth in America’s largest 100 metropolitan areas between 1990 and 2008 (see Figure 6). We end the time frame just as the recession was setting in part to keep our focus on the long-haul rather than the short-term impacts of the recent downturn. As can be seen, there is a positive correlation: a rising share of immigrants is associated with a faster pace of job creation.²³

Of course, the causality runs two ways. While it is likely that immigrants, with their high rates of labor force attachment and disposition towards entrepreneurship, are likely to prompt employment and production, it is also the case that a more buoyant economy attracts immigrants. On the other hand, such buoyancy should also attract migrants from within the United States, and the fact that the share of the foreign-born rises suggests that the immigrant presence is a driving factor. This is the case in the Silicon Valley where immigrant entrepreneurs are helping to power the high-tech industry, in our agriculturally-oriented metros where immigrant labor keeps farming competitive, and in our larger metros where immigrants are helping to revitalize cities and staff the service sector that supports the growth of professional, financial, and business activities.

Moreover, to the extent that immigrants respond to, rather than propel, metropolitan employment opportunities, this role of “filling in” is critical to keeping a metro area’s economic trajectory positive. Economists ranging from the most conservative to the most liberal tend to agree that immigrants provide a net boost to the American economy; the usual concern is whether there are simultaneously some negative impacts on less-skilled U.S.-born workers. The evidence is mixed, although there are ways to

insure that competitive effects are minimized, particularly by advancing the training and education levels of the U.S.-born.²⁴ So, while dealing with potential displacement impacts of immigrant labor can pose some challenges for metropolitan leaders, the general evidence seems clear: immigrants and economic vitality go together and furthering immigrant integration can be an important part of working towards equity, opportunity, and sustainability in our metro regions.

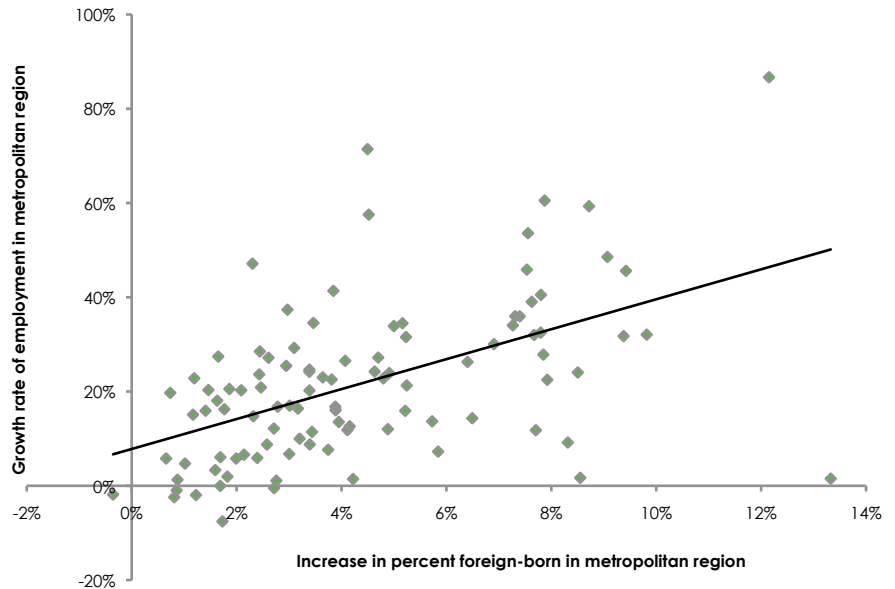
Environmental Sustainability

Immigrants may also be a boon for environmental sustainability. In a 2010 *Los Angeles Times/University of Southern California* poll of Californians, Latinos and Asian Americans were significantly more concerned about global warming, air pollution, and water and soil contamination than non-Hispanic white respondents. Moreover, when the Latino respondents were split by the language in which they took the survey, Spanish speakers (a proxy for Latino immigrants) were significantly more concerned than English respondents on each of these topics.²⁵ So, while some think the environment is of little concern to immigrants, the polling in California suggests otherwise.

Moreover, immigrants are often among those at the forefront of taking environmental action. Again from California, in Richmond, they have been pushing for refinery clean-up and remediation; in Los Angeles, for the creation of “Green Zones” to reduce the disproportionately-high toxic burden on immigrant communities; and in the Central Valley, to provide clean and affordable water to everyone. These communities are taking action around some of the worst excesses of pollution, and are actually working to solve climate issues while governments are stuck in debates about how to move forward.²⁶

Immigrants are also helping to bring to fruition dreams of more sustainable development by living in the urban core. “New Urbanism” proscribes dense neighborhoods with access to mass transit, ample street life, and local retail amenities – that describes many urban *barrios* with *taquerías* taking the place of cappuccino bars.²⁷ And some of the largest Asian American enclaves are in the thick of west coast urban life – the Sunset District (in San Francisco), the San Gabriel Valley and Koreatown (in Los Angeles County), and Chinatown (in both). Immigrants are a group whose housing and transportation practices might resemble the environmentally-friendlier patterns of communities of color – in which people are more likely to use sustainable forms of transit (such as carpooling, walking, and public transportation) to get to work.²⁸ Encouraging immigrants’ use of mass transit by expanding these systems could point the way to the recovery of our older, urban areas and more climate-savvy means of development.²⁹

Figure 6. Employment Growth and Shift in the Percent Foreign-Born
100 Largest Metropolitan Areas, 1990-2008



Source: PERE analysis of the Urban Institute's MetroTrends database and the Building Resilient Regions database.

Need for Local Strategies

Previous generations of immigrants were, in a sense, lucky: an industrial economy was eager to absorb their work, unions helped catapult many into the middle class, and public education was expanding and adequate to the task of moving their children in the direction of the American Dream. Integration in that era was less a plan than an assumed outcome. What is different in the contemporary period is that many of these institutions – a manufacturing economy, unions, and public education – have eroded, and successful settlement in a new land requires intentional policies that both help immigrants adjust to their new communities and communities adjust to the new immigrant populations.

This is of particular importance given that America's increasing diversification and immigrants' settlement in new destinations have led to anxiety in some localities. In many areas this has meant a cooler reception for immigrants and a stronger emphasis on enforcement, rather than integration. In addition, a stalemate in Washington, in terms of a comprehensive immigration policy, means it is more important than ever to focus on local integration efforts.

Because immigrant integration is a two-way process in which immigrant newcomers and host communities transform and adapt to one another, we need a new frame that stresses mutual benefits and the co-creation of community. In his book, *Immigrants and Boomers*, Dowell Myers argues that aging baby boomers' incipient demands on retirement and health care systems are bigger issues for America than the cultural changes brought by new arrivals. We actually need immigrants to expand our labor pool, and we also need settled immigrants to do well economically and socially in order to pay taxes, contribute to health insurance, and buy the houses of retired boomers and those recently foreclosed upon. And we especially need the children of immigrants to do well in order to power our nation's future productivity and competitiveness.³⁰

Regional governmental agencies as well as regional leadership and philanthropic bodies play a prominent role in facilitating this two-way process of conversations, interventions, and propositions. But immigrants and the nation's immigrant destinations are extremely diverse – language, country of origin, perceptions of host communities, and economic realities vary depending on place and will determine the success of immigrant integration. Thus, we need to move away from a one-size-fits-all strategy and towards more comprehensive, holistic initiatives. After all, all migration is local and municipalities are perhaps best equipped to develop integration strategies that work best for the region.

Strategies

Immigrant Integration

Immigrant integration strategies must be holistic in scope and place, and as diverse as the immigrant populations and receiving communities they seek to serve. Here, we organize our discussion of potential strategies under our three goals for immigrant integration, focusing on how to: 1) increase economic mobility for immigrants and their U.S.-born counterparts, 2) enhance immigrant's civic engagement along with their neighbors', and 3) generate warmth of welcome towards immigrants and their families.

We elaborate on these goals below and highlight real examples where local and regional civic leaders are taking action for immigrant integration. MPOs can contribute to the multiple, diverse, and multifaceted strategies of immigrant integration we offer. Acting with partners such as community foundations and local civic leaders, MPOs can be conveners, funders, policy drivers, and facilitators of cultural exchange. The following examples feature local and regional entities working together with broad coalitions for the economic, civic, and social integration of immigrants into America's geographically and culturally diverse neighborhoods. They range from recognizing cultural and ethnic diversity, to developing leadership and English language skills and creating opportunities for community engagement and civic participation.

Goal 1. Increase economic mobility for immigrants, their families, and their communities.

Socio-economic mobility is a cherished aspiration of American society. As discussed earlier, our research shows that immigrants are a major part of a diversifying America, and many are highly educated. However, many are often relegated to low-skill and low-wage occupations with limited opportunities to move up the economic ladder – and even the most highly educated often find challenges translating degrees earned in their home country into credentials accepted in the U.S. labor market.³¹ Increasing opportunities for the economic mobility of immigrants, their families, and their communities can help immigrant fortunes as well as improve the economy overall by maximizing their ability to contribute.

Some of the barriers limiting immigrants' economic mobility include: limited-to-no knowledge of English, lack of transferable professional credentials, insufficient social connections to high-paying occupations (partly because of residence in areas of concentrated poverty), and in some cases, a lack of documentation. Local governmental entities can create opportunities to increase the economic mobility of immigrants and impoverished U.S.-born populations.

Strategies:

- Partner with community colleges, businesses, and labor to provide worksite English language and skills-training classes with well-qualified instructors.
- Partner with professional associations and city and state agencies to transfer and validate licenses, accreditations, and professional degrees obtained outside of the country.
- Analyze career ladders, with special attention to upward mobility and attachment to growing industries, such as the green economy and health care, and build this knowledge into inclusive apprenticeship programs for African American and immigrant youth.
- Encourage and develop mechanisms that allow immigrants – documented and otherwise – to start small businesses that serve your region's market needs.
- Partner with financial institutions to facilitate homeownership and fixed-loan qualifications among immigrants and U.S.-born residents most impacted by the recession.

Immigrant integration strategies should include economically-hurting, U.S.-born populations.

In order to avoid friction, economic mobility strategies should focus on improving economic opportunities for immigrants, but also for their families and neighbors. In particular, African American communities, who have historically faced many barriers to economic mobility, need to be incorporated into the strategy.

Economic mobility strategies should include supporting immigrant entrepreneurship with loan and micro-loan programs, as well as educational classes that cover topics such as business incorporation (e.g. provide a "how to" on limited liability company (LLC) formation). These types of efforts help avoid competition through job creation and also help undocumented immigrants engage in enterprise and pay taxes while regions wait for Congress to derive some path to legalization.

Building Skills Partnership: Building Economic Mobility (California)

The Building Skills Partnership is a California-wide, nonprofit organization that is a collaboration of community members, responsible cleaning businesses and contractors, building owners, the Building Owners Managers Association (BOMA), and Service Employees International Union-United Service Workers West (SEIU-USWW). It offers a wide range of capacity and skills-building support, including customized vocational training, computer literacy, and English language classes.

In 2007, SEIU-USWW formalized its collaboration with over 80 cleaning contractors and their clients to create programs to improve the quality of life of its members and the industry as a whole – this union is known as the Building Skills Partnership (BSP). SEIU-USWW represents an estimated 40,000 janitors or property service workers – most of them immigrant workers – throughout the state of California and hopes to help its workers build skills and opportunities for career and community advancement through worksite-based and employer-funded classes. BSP class attendance rates are 80 percent – a high rate considering that many are immigrant workers who often hold two jobs and have not been formally educated beyond the sixth grade. For three consecutive years, BSP has also helped participants and their children access education through scholarships.

Sources: "Building Skills Partnership Providing Workplace ESL Instruction to an Immigrant Workforce," United States General Services Administration, <http://2012serviceimpact.challenge.gov/submissions/7649-economic-opportunity-building-skills-partnership-providing-workplace-esl-instruction-to-an-immigrant-workforce> (accessed June 26, 2012); "About Us," Service Employees International Union-United Service Workers West, <http://www.seiu-usww.org> (accessed June 26, 2012); "2012 BSP Scholarship Information," Building Skills Partnership, <http://www.buildingskills.org/2012/05/2012-bsp-scholarship-now-available/> (accessed June 26, 2012).

Goal 2. Enhance opportunities for civic participation by immigrants.

Immigrants, as residents of our communities, need to participate in America's civic life. Local governments are instrumental in helping eligible permanent residents obtain their U.S. citizenship, receive training in English as a second language (ESL), and learn about the country's democratic and voting systems – nationally and locally.

There are ample opportunities for non-citizens to exercise civic participation too, including getting involved in school meetings, local planning projects, community organizations, civic clubs, hometown associations, faith-based organizations, and neighborhood groups. These institutions have been responsible for the integration of immigrants in the past and can continue to explicitly incorporate immigrants today.

Civic participation barriers exist.

- Immigrants in low-income jobs who supplement their wages with a second job or overtime have little time for civic engagement.
- Real or perceived feelings of hostility towards immigrants incite fear of repression, deportation, and decreases participation among immigrants.
- Few or no formal mechanisms which are culturally and linguistically sensitive can make it difficult for immigrants to connect.

Much of this involvement can be led by local governmental entities which are responsible for gathering community input and connecting residents to its region's resources, such as with local immigrant-serving organizations and local services. Immigrants, like other U.S.-born residents, have the right to influence the decisions that directly impact their lives, families and communities. Ultimately, the benefits of immigrant civic participation are a two-way stream. For example, increased involvement by immigrant parents in schools may in return improve K-12 education or after school programs for their and everyone else's children. The participation of immigrants will strengthen the civic and democratic fabric of local neighborhoods.

Strategies:

- Collaborate with community organizations or unions to conduct successful outreach to U.S.-born and immigrant residents.
- Hold public meetings, government services, and community events where community input is solicited with translation and interpreter services.
- Engage immigrants and their neighbors in city planning, K-12 education improvement efforts, and decisions that impact their communities.
- Engage immigrants in Get Out The Vote (GOTV) efforts in order to develop a practice of democracy and electoral engagement even before naturalization.
- Invest in programs that help immigrants complete the naturalization process by providing ESL and civics classes, assistance with the application process, and fee waivers.

New Americans Citizenship Project: Promoting Naturalization (Maryland)

CASA de Maryland is a nonprofit, immigrant rights organization founded in 1985 by various congregations and individuals from Latin America and the United States. Originally established to serve the needs of political refugees from Central America, it now serves a wide range of immigrants and sustains multiple programs, including a microfinance program.

Immigrant advocates note that the key barriers to naturalization are immigrants' lack of English language skills and the expensive application process --the naturalization application filing fee alone is \$676 (and this excludes any additional related expenses, such as preparatory class fees). In 2011, CASA de Maryland joined Citigroup Foundation, the Latino Economic Development Corp., the Ethiopian Community Development Council Enterprise Development Group, and other financial and nonprofit institutions to pilot a \$400,000 program to boost the naturalization rates of green card holders – an estimated 210,000 permanent residents who live in Maryland and more in the greater Washington, DC area. Together they provide microloans, legal referrals, one-on-one guidance, and civic and financial education classes to immigrants seeking to start their citizenship application process. This is a very encouraging effort that tackles multiple challenges to promote naturalization.

Sources: Luz Lazo, "Microloan Program to Help Legal Immigrants Cover Naturalization Costs," *The Washington Post*, October 31, 2011; "New Americans Citizenship Project of Maryland," CASA de Maryland, http://casademaryland.org/storage/www/your_subsite/ (accessed June 25, 2012); "Naturalization Eligibility and Applications," USA Citizenship Services, <http://www.usacitizenship.info/application.html> (accessed June 25, 2012).

Goal 3. Increase warmth of welcome towards immigrants and their families.

America prides itself on its openness to people and ideas. It is this sort of openness that will allow us to accommodate change and build a framework that can make the most of what immigrants and their families can offer to our broader regional, social, and economic health.

The way towards openness involves both changing attitudes and realities. The required attitude shift for U.S.-born populations involves gaining knowledge and understanding of the immigrant situation and their true contributions to the region. This requires changing public misconceptions and acknowledging the economic and social contributions of immigrants – which are plentiful. For immigrant residents, it involves constant participation in local social events and direct contact with established residents.

Government policies and strategies can scale up and sustain the bonds of person-to-person and community-to-community relationships. We believe one way to do this is by supporting issues that affect immigrant and non-immigrant communities. Housing, education, and public transportation, to name a few, are issues that affect everyone – and immigrants in particular.

Strategies:

- Convene a coalition across regional and local agencies to address the importance of government’s responsibility for immigrant integration.
- Work with academic and research institutions to generate reports highlighting immigrant economic and social contributions.
- Support cultural events which help educate non-immigrants on the benefits and diversity of immigrants.
- Consider partnering with faith-based institutions that might already be facilitating direct contact and exchange of personal experiences between community groups.
- Start a welcoming initiative or affiliate with Welcoming America (for more information on Welcoming America, see the resource list at the end of this document) to bring together immigrant and non-immigrant leaders from your community to improve relations and connections.

Understanding and reframing the immigrant debate.

Public misunderstandings of immigrants greatly affect how receiving communities welcome their immigrants. Major misunderstandings occur when complex issues get reduced to sound bites and accusations. Understanding and acknowledging the positive contributions of immigrants help reframe the debate. Focus on:

- Presenting accurate information about immigrants and immigration to change common misperceptions.
- Person-to-person contact between immigrants and U.S.-born – it can really change people’s perceptions of immigrants and immigration.
- Tackling issues that affect receiving communities and immigrants helps reframe the debate to commonalities, instead of differences.

Beloved Community Center of Greensboro: Fostering Cross-Racial Unity (North Carolina)

Faith-based organizations are instrumental for relieving prickly tensions, facilitating friendly dialogue, and establishing long-term relationships between new and U.S.-born residents. Beloved Community Center (BCC) is an African American-led, faith-based organization founded in 1991 in Greensboro, North Carolina. It was founded by several faith-based leaders who brought with them the legacies of the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. Martin Luther King, and Ella Baker. BCC aims to build an inclusive and “beloved community” through community organizing, advocacy, and coalition building.

In 2008, BCC joined other groups across the state and organized the first Black-Brown Conference which brought together over 300 U.S.-born African American residents and Latino immigrants to share personal experiences that unify them under the common goals of justice and dignity. Their dialogue explored the interconnected struggles of African American and Latino communities – around education, labor, police accountability, and economic well-being. Today, BCC continues to work with immigrant-serving organizations, such as the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, a long-time advocate for immigrant workers, and is an important voice of native-born residents that extends solidarity to its new residents.

Source: Gerald Lenoir, Deborah Lee, and Chad Jones, *Crossing Boundaries, Connecting Communities: Alliance Building for Immigration Rights and Racial Justice* (San Francisco, CA: The Black Alliance for Just Immigration, 2009).

Conclusion

What is certain across the United States is that immigrants have arrived in large numbers to new and old locations. What is less certain is how they will be integrated. In a recent analysis of regional resilience, researchers found that there are characteristics common to places where immigrant arrivals are handled with greater ease and capitalized upon. These places have an understanding of the diversity of their immigrants, a good balance of service and civic engagement resources, a focus on reworking multiple systems to benefit immigrants (and the U.S.-born residents, along the way), take an intentionally “regionalist” view, and – if they are new immigrant gateways – consider the need for extra “start-up” resources. In these places, the potential of immigrants is seen and incorporated.³²

While local and regional governments have a particular responsibility for incorporating their newcomers, this does not preclude the need to develop a more coherent set of national immigration policies. But local municipalities and regional civic leaders are increasingly facing the responsibility of ensuring the smooth integration of its foreign-born and U.S.-born residents, alone. Developing and implementing integration strategies may appear overwhelming, but the initial ‘things to consider’ are quite simple.

- *Begin by understanding the landscape of your community.* Who are the immigrant populations, their families, and neighbors (see the “Immigrant Metrics” box to the right)? Who are the advocates working on issues that can benefit both immigrants and U.S.-born residents? And who are the unlikely allies, such as businesses who see the virtue of immigrant workers, faith-based leaders who understand that “welcoming the stranger” speaks to our better sides, or neighborhood watch groups who want better community relations? Given diverse local landscapes (the people, politics, and programs in each place), regional agencies of various kinds can identify and help communities determine what mix of economic, civic, and social strategies can create the most positive conditions for integration. Inclusion of U.S.-born populations, especially people of color and economically-hurting populations, is key to avoiding or diffusing social tensions.
- *Implement the strategy: Build up your organization.* Organizations should hire staff (e.g. bilingual and/or immigrant) who can interface with diverse communities and can communicate effectively with immigrant and non-immigrant communities. In terms of outreach, organizations should produce key marketing and other materials in multiple languages, provide interpretation services during public meetings, and host bilingual meetings. Finally, all efforts should stress that working on integration issues is not an “immigrant issue” or a problem for immigrants to solve – rather, the advantages of immigrant integration to regional resilience benefit all residents as integration is a two-way process that helps accustom U.S.-born and foreign-born residents to each other.
- *Identify and support partners. Policy shifts do not occur in a vacuum; they are part of broader social movements.* Supporting local organizing efforts which seek to reframe the debate and provide a balanced view of immigrant

Immigrant Metrics: Develop a Profile of Immigrants in Your Region

Publicly available datasets, such as the U.S. Decennial Census and the American Community Survey are used regularly by municipal planning offices to inform community planning decisions. Using these datasets to track immigrant demographics can add nuance to regional planning processes and programs, and serve as a baseline for measuring integration. While no quantitative measure tells the full story, there are measures that can help identify immigrant populations. Among them:

Immigrant flows by decade: The change in the number of immigrants entering the region by decade.

Country of origin: The level of diversity among immigrants in the community.

Immigrant children: The share of those 18 and younger who are immigrants – also known as the “1.5 generation.”

Children with an immigrant parent: The share of non-immigrant children who live with an immigrant parent – the second generation.

Linguistic isolation: The share of households in which no individual 14 or older speaks English well or exclusively.

Naturalization rates: The share of those eligible to naturalize who have, versus those who have remained long-term permanent residents.

Look at how well immigrants are faring by:

- Income
- Housing
- Employment
- Education
- Access (to a vehicle for work, health insurance, etc.)

Take into consideration:

- The economic trajectory of immigrants: Pay attention to how immigrants’ income, housing, and employment patterns have changed over time,
- How different groups of immigrants within the region are faring compared to each other and fully integrated groups, and
- How immigrants in the region are doing compared to those in other similar regions.

contributions to the local and regional economy and overall society is key. Organizations may consider working with research and academic institutions that highlight root causes of immigration and immigrants' contributions to the region's success and economic sustainability. Finally, it is important to support multi-ethnic, multi-sector, and multi-agency convening processes that bring immigrants and non-immigrants together.

The political stalemate in Washington may have stalled progress on immigration reform but immigrants are still arriving, their children are still being born, and their labor is still critical to our metropolitan economies. Local governments and regional planners have an opportunity – and in light of the political stalemate, an obligation – to lead through the challenge of weaving the future fabric of America. They can craft responses that lead to either exclusion or inclusion, resilience or brittleness, cohesion or fragmentation.

After all, what is at stake is not just immigrant outcomes – the futures of these localities are deeply connected to the fates of the large numbers of immigrants and their children. Integration strategies are not a special program or a special interest; they are part of a common effort that can benefit everyone, and resonates deeply with long-standing American values of economic mobility, democratic participation, and openness to people and ideas. Working from the bottom up, local governments, planners and civic leaders can use immigrant integration strategies as one part of an overall effort to ensure the economic and democratic future of our neighborhoods, our metro areas, and our nation.



Photo by Brooke Anderson.

Resources

Although often under-discussed in most national conversations, immigrant integration is a well-studied and a growing set of practices. Below are resources to aid regional organizations in developing their understanding and strategies to further integration. These organizations highlight real efforts by local governments, community-based organizations and unlikely allies who are building the economic, civic, and social fabric of America's neighborhoods.

- The *Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration* at the University of Southern California (CSII) is associated with the Program for Environmental and Regional Equity, (the authors of this policy brief). In keeping with the idea that we should take our own advice, [CSII](#) has engaged in many of the activities profiled here, having worked with researchers, policy advocates, and community organizations to develop analysis on immigrant contributions and immigrant progress. CSII has also worked with a local community foundation to convene the Council on Immigrant Integration that brings together business and civic leaders as well as planners and others to work on integration in Los Angeles as a regional effort.
- *Diversity Dynamics LLC* is associated with the Center for International Social Work at Rutgers University's School of Social Work. It too, has compiled extensive information on projects, programs, and policies developed by local governments. Their [website](#) includes useful literature on local governments' immigrant integration policies.
- *Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees* (GCIR) is a leading affinity group for philanthropies engaged in immigrant integration. GCIR has commissioned and published numerous [publications](#) on immigrant integration practices and also offers a vehicle for identifying, engaging and incorporating local philanthropy in your region.
- The *Institute for Local Government* recently published [A Local Official's Guide to Immigrant Civic Engagement](#), which provides strategies and resources for increasing immigrant participation into the planning processes.
- The *Metropolitan Mayors Caucus* in Illinois is a forum for cooperation between the Chicago region's nine suburban municipal associations. In 2011, its [Diversity Issues Task Force](#) began surveying immigrant integration efforts in the region's municipalities. Their findings were recently published into an immigrant integration [guidebook](#).
- The *Migration Policy Institute* (MPI) is a leading think tank looking at issues of immigrant integration (as well as immigration policy). MPI is a particularly useful resource for [data](#) and the Institute's [National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy](#) offers a wealth of studies and accounts of best practices.
- *National League of Cities* (NLC) has helped city, village, and town officials address a myriad of issues. NLC developed a pilot program, [Municipal Action for Immigrant Integration Program](#), which provides support to localities interested in integrating their immigrant populations. They maintain a thorough record of integration programs in the nation.
- The *National Partnership for New Americans* is a national association of integration experts and advocacy organizations that helps local agencies develop innovative integration programs. The Partnership recently prepared a *New Americans Initiative template* for municipalities and local citizenship advocates which helps governments develop and implement New American Initiatives, provides tools for collaboration with businesses and nonprofits, and includes communication and media strategies that reframe the debate. The Partnership recently helped the United States Conference of Mayors pass its own [New Americans Resolution](#).
- *Welcoming America* is a collaborative of organizations across the United States committed to promoting respect and cooperation between foreign-born and U.S.-born residents. They have developed the [Receiving Communities Initiative \(RCI\)](#), which is intended to help new receiving communities build a movement of individuals and organizations focused on engaging U.S.-born Americans in integration projects.

Notes

- ¹ Jesse Ellison, “Lewiston, Maine, Revived by Somali Immigrants,” *The Daily Beast*, January 16, 2009, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2009/01/16/the-refugees-who-saved-lewiston.html>.
- ² Douglas S. Massey, “Ethnic Residential Segregation: A Theoretical Synthesis and Empirical Review,” *Sociology and Social Research* 69, no. 3 (1985): 315–350.
- ³ Audrey Singer, *The Rise of New Immigrant Gateways* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy, 2004), http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/reports/2004/2/demographics%20singer/20040301_gateways.pdf.
- ⁴ Manuel Pastor and Rhonda Ortiz, *Immigrant Integration in Los Angeles: Strategic Directions for Funders* (Los Angeles, CA: USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity, 2009), http://csii.usc.edu/documents/immigrant_integration.pdf.
- ⁵ Monica Varsanyi, ed., *Taking Local Control: Immigration Policy Activism in U.S. Cities and States* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).
- ⁶ The Silicon Valley Community Foundation strategically supports the three key areas of immigrant integration. Its initiative aims to enhance civic participation, improve economic mobility, and promote mutual benefits by funding program areas that bridge the cultural gap, strengthen the legal services infrastructure, and expand adult English Language acquisition. The Colorado Trust noted the demographic transformations of local communities in 1999 and in 2000 launched its Supporting Immigrant and Refugee Families Initiative (SIRFI), a ten-year-long program which helped local communities integrate their new immigrant residents. These are among the first pioneering foundations which paved the way towards funding immigrant integration. For more, see: “Immigrant Integration,” Silicon Valley Community Foundation, <http://www.siliconvalleycf.org/content/immigrant-integration> (accessed July 25, 2012); “Grants, Immigrant Integration,” The Colorado Trust, <http://www.coloradotrust.org/grants/show-grant?id=51> (accessed July 15, 2012).
- ⁷ PERE analysis of 2010 Integrated Public Use Microdata Series American Community Survey (IPUMS ACS) data. Steven Ruggles et al., *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 5.0* [Machine-readable database] (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 2010).
- ⁸ Angela Glover Blackwell, Stewart Kwoh and Manuel Pastor, *Uncommon Common Ground: Race and America’s Future* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010).
- ⁹ PERE analysis of 2008-2010 IPUMS ACS. A pooled sample (of the 2008, 2009, and 2010 IPUMS ACS datasets) was used in this analysis, and the analyses below.
- ¹⁰ PERE analysis of 2000 IPUMS Census five percent sample and 2008-2010 IPUMS ACS.
- ¹¹ PERE analysis of 2008-2010 IPUMS ACS.
- ¹² PERE analysis of 2008-2010 IPUMS ACS.
- ¹³ Dyssegaard Kallick, *Immigrant Small Business Owners: A Significant and Growing Part of the Economy* (New York, NY: The Fiscal Policy Institute, 2012), <http://www.fiscalpolicy.org/immigrant-small-business-owners-FPI-20120614.pdf>.
- ¹⁴ PERE analysis of 2008-2010 IPUMS ACS. We chose 150 percent of the Federal Poverty Line as we find it more accurately accounts for those struggling economically. In 2010, this level captured four-person households living below approximately \$33,000 a year. For more, see: “The HHS Poverty Guidelines for the Remainder of 2010 (August 2010),” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/10poverty.shtml> (accessed July 15, 2012).
- ¹⁵ Victor Zúñiga and Ruben Hernández-León, *New Destinations: Mexican Immigration in the United States* (New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 2005).
- ¹⁶ Audrey Singer, Susan W. Hardwick, and Caroline Brettell, eds., *Twenty-First Century Gateways: Immigrant Incorporation in Suburban America* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2008).
- ¹⁷ Aaron Terrazas, *U.S. in Focus: Immigrants in New-Destination States* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2011).
- ¹⁸ Singer, Hardwick, and Brettell, eds., *Twenty-First Century Gateways*, 2008.
- ¹⁹ Jill Wilson and Audrey Singer, *Immigrants in 2010 Metropolitan America: A Decade of Change* (Washington DC: The Brookings Institution, 2011).
- ²⁰ Sarah Treuhaft, Angela Glover Blackwell, and Manuel Pastor, *America’s Tomorrow: Equity Is the Superior Growth Model* (Oakland, CA: PolicyLink and USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity, 2011), http://www.policylink.org/atf/cf/%7B97c6d565-bb43-406d-a6d5-eca3bbf35af0%7D/SUMMIT_FRAMING_WEB_FINAL_20120127.PDF.
- ²¹ *ibid.*
- ²² Jeffrey Passel, D’Vera Cohn, and Ana Gonzalez-Barrera, *Net Migration from Mexico Falls to Zero and Perhaps Less* (Washington, DC: The Pew Hispanic Center, 2012), http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/2012/04/Mexican-migrants-report_final.pdf.

- ²³ The data in this graph come from the Urban Institute's MetroTrends project and involve a combination of Census data on population and Local Area Unemployment Statistics on employment. For more, see: "MetroTrends," Urban Institute, <http://www.metrotrends.org/data.html> (accessed June 23, 2012). In the MetroTrends database there is an error on the 1990 demographics of the Miami-Fort Lauderdale metropolitan area and so we substitute in the figures from the Building Resilient Regions database developed as part of the Building Resilient Regions network, funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.
- ²⁴ See pages 21-35 in Manuel Pastor, Juan De Lara and Justin Scoggins, *All Together Now? African Americans, Immigrants and the Future of California* (Los Angeles, CA: USC Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration, 2011), http://csii.usc.edu/documents/alltogethernow_technical_report_web.pdf.
- ²⁵ Tabulations by the University of Southern California's Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration of the 2010 University of Southern California/Los Angeles Times poll data. For more, see: "A Changing California Electorate: Lessons from the USC College/L.A. Times Poll," Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration, http://csii.usc.edu/events_la_times_poll.html (accessed July 1, 2012).
- ²⁶ Ellen Kersten, Rachel Morello-Frosch, Manuel Pastor and Marlene Ramos, *Facing the Climate Gap: How Environmental Justice Communities are Leading the Way to a More Sustainable and Equitable California* (Los Angeles, CA: University of Southern California, Program for Environmental and Regional Equity, forthcoming).
- ²⁷ Manuel Pastor, "Quien es Mas Urbanista? Latinos and Smart Growth," in *Growing Smarter: Achieving Livable Communities, Environmental Justice, and Regional Equity*, ed. Robert D. Bullard (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).
- ²⁸ PERE analysis of 2008-2010 IPUMS ACS. Sustainable transportation is defined as any mode of transport which is public, non-vehicular or high-occupancy vehicular.
- ²⁹ Manuel Pastor, "Just Growth: Foundations, Social Movements, and the Smart Growth Agenda," in *Looking Forward: Perspectives on Future Opportunities for Philanthropy*, ed. Maureen Lawless (Coral Gables, FL: Funders Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities, 2009), http://www.fundersnetwork.org/files/learn/Looking_Forward_PDF_for_Viewing.pdf.
- ³⁰ Dowell Myers, *Immigrants and Boomers: Forging a New Social Contract for the Future of America* (New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 2007).
- ³¹ Jeanne Batalova and Michael Fix, *Uneven Progress: The Unemployment Pathways of Skilled Immigrants in the United States* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2008), <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/BrainWasteOct08.pdf>.
- ³² Manuel Pastor and John Mollenkopf, "Struggling Over Strangers or Receiving with Resilience? The Metropolitcs of Immigrant Incorporation," in *Urban and Regional Policy and Its Effects, vol. 4: Building Resilient Regions*, eds. Nancy Pindus et al. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2012).



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