

# WELCOMING SAN DIEGO

Strategic Plan on Immigrant & Refugee Integration  
2019-2024

The City of  
**SAN DIEGO**

 **GATEWAYS  
for GROWTH**



# OVERVIEW

Welcoming San Diego ([www.welcomingsd.org](http://www.welcomingsd.org)) is a multi-sector effort to advance the civic, social and economic integration of immigrants and refugees. We envision a vibrant, inclusive and resilient binational region that attracts families and businesses from around the world and that all San Diegans can flourish in.

Uniquely situated on the U.S.-Mexico border, San Diego has long been a destination for migrants in search of opportunity, and a longstanding hub for refugees rebuilding their lives. Our heritage, strength and future are tied to our ability to ensure aspiring New Americans can fully participate in civic life, access public resources and enrich the region with their talents and cultures.

This immigrant integration strategic plan is a culmination of year-long consultations and community forums. The effort is supported by the Gateways for Growth grant from New American Economy and Welcoming America, matched by the California Endowment.

As presented during Welcoming San Diego's kickoff summit in February 2018, the evidence of immigrants' contributions is clear: immigrants and refugees who call San Diego home are indispensable to the regional economy. Based on this understanding, the strategic plan presents an opportunity to build on newcomers' assets and desire to succeed, and to work together toward a more connected community.

This document was created with the input of hundreds of residents, dozens of organizations and a cross-sector steering committee covering five topic areas: economic opportunity, education, inclusive access, civic engagement and safe communities. The committee also studied strategic plans, immigrant affairs offices and best practices in peer cities. While we believe the recommendations are comprehensive, and when implemented, will advance our city and region in significant ways, we understand this is the first blueprint that will require further iterations, innovation and evaluation in order to achieve these positive outcomes.

The 20 recommendations begin with four cross-sector recommendations that strengthen the relevant systems and sustains and elevates the collaborations. The remainder of the recommendations is sorted by focus areas. Each of those recommendations has corresponding short-term strategies that can be initiated, funded or scaled in the first three years (2019-2022) that builds upon existing activities among stakeholders. Long-term strategies are to be studied initially, then legislated, piloted or scaled within three to five years, or they can be enacted in the short-term that result in sustained impact beyond five years. Footnotes reference existing programs, best practices or toolkits. By the end of 2020, we will review the status of each short-term recommendation, calibrate timeline and reaffirm the goals. We will also benchmark San Diego's outcomes, policies and practices via the New American Economy Cities Index. By the end of 2022, an impact evaluation will be conducted to measure effectiveness of these strategies.

This plan will require all stakeholders to commit to sustained collaboration, communication and accountability measures. Through working together on these recommendations, we will build an inclusive regional culture that bridges newcomer and native-born communities toward shared prosperity and a common future.

The usage of "immigrants" in this document includes refugees, asylees, asylum seekers and other foreign-born residents living in the U.S.

"Immigrant integration" is a two-way process whereby newcomers and the host society work together to build resilient, cohesive and flourishing communities.

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# FROM THE STEERING COMMITTEE

Dear Fellow San Diegans,

Over the past 12 months, we had the privilege of working together across civic, business, social, education and government sectors to produce this strategic plan that will serve as a blueprint for San Diego to become an even more inclusive, dynamic and cohesive city and region.

This process illuminated the various needs and assets of San Diego's immigrant and refugee communities. It builds on the incredible commitment by individuals and organizations to welcome and incorporate newcomers, and it is inspired by the struggles, triumphs and aspirations of New Americans.

Just as San Diego bridges Tijuana to integrate the most dynamic cross-border megaregion in North America, just as we progress our forward-thinking climate action plan, and just as our universities and companies push the frontiers of technology and innovation, we believe practicing hospitality and inclusion is the hallmark of what makes San Diego special, creative and adaptive.

Collaborating across organizations and learning together has cemented our conviction that everyone benefits from immigrant integration, and welcoming should be everybody's business. By examining other sub-national plans, policies and outcomes, we look forward to contributing to the world-wide movement of cities that leverage the assets of migrants to enhance inclusive economic growth, smart planning, social cohesion and systems resiliency.

We are grateful for the many ideas, stories and discussions from community members and organizations that anchor this strategic plan. The feedback and community partnerships have resulted in several key areas of policy that our region should consider. The plan addresses the critical systems that can play a deeper and more collaborative role in the incorporation of immigrants and refugees. While there are differences between the groups and organizations that have worked on this initiative, and there remain points of debate in the margins of this document, this strategic plan presents a good faith effort to build consensus and civility around a conversation too often politicized and divisive in our country.

We believe the population of immigrants (one in four San Diegans) must be an integral part of policymaking in multiple areas. Accordingly, we call on our local leaders: mayors, city councilmembers, county supervisors and other elected and administrative leaders to implement the plan and institutionalize the work of immigrant integration in local government. Moreover, we encourage more immigrant leaders to demand a seat and lean in at decision-making tables.

We encourage philanthropists, businesspeople and researchers to identify best practices, evidence-based approaches and financing models to sustain and strengthen the immigrant-serving network, to foster entrepreneurship and to grow immigrant-led enterprises.

We invite guardians of systems such as schools, places of worship, human services, cultural institutions and law enforcement to deepen their inclusivity and cultural responsiveness.



Last but not least, we are excited for newcomer and receiving communities. We are proud that San Diego is a gateway for dreamers, builders and freedom-seekers. We celebrate the diversity in our neighborhoods, classrooms and workplaces. We are optimistic that San Diegans will continue to embrace the ideas, talents and cultures that newcomers bring to make this a world-class city for all.

Whether you just made San Diego your adopted home, or your family has established roots here for generations, our collective future in this sunny corner of the Earth will depend on all of us to listen and understand one another, to appreciate one another's cultures and to work toward the flourishing of our region.

Sincerely,

**Mary Abad**

San Diego International Affairs Board

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County of San Diego

**Paola Avila**

San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce

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Business for Good

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# PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

## Community Engagement

1. Kickoff Summit convened over 300 community leaders and stakeholders from across the region to brainstorm ideas and solutions. (February 2018)
2. New American Economy produced data report on economic and demographic snapshot of immigrants and refugees in San Diego. (February 2018)
3. Seven community forums convened hundreds of community members to discuss immigrants' and refugees' aspirations, barriers to success and solutions. (March–June 2018)
4. Online comments and feedback period. (January–September 2018)
5. Attitudinal survey of immigrants was designed and piloted for community (as of October 2018, not enough respondents to show results; to be continued)
6. Steering Committee members sought feedback from dozens of respective stakeholder groups (staff, clients, members, boards, constituents). (June–September 2018)

## Analysis and Drafting

1. All community input was transcribed and analyzed to identify emerging themes and frequency of ideas and concerns. (July 2018)
2. Steering Committee members reviewed immigrant integration plans from peer cities:
  - Aurora, CO
  - Chicago, IL
  - Houston, TX
  - San Jose, CA
3. Steering Committee members examined structures for immigrant affairs offices in:
  - Atlanta, GA
  - Boston, MA
  - Los Angeles, CA
  - New York, NY
  - Seattle, WA
  - San Francisco, CA
4. Steering Committee reviewed literature of local approaches to immigrant integration through consultation with academic partners, researchers and immigrant-serving organizations. (June–September 2018)
5. Steering Committee members formed focus area teams to analyze data, ideas and draft recommendations. (July 2018)
6. Partner organizations (50+) provided edits and suggestions (August–September 2018)



# SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

## Cross-Sector:

1. Create the Office for Immigrant Advancement (OIA) to institutionalize and elevate immigrant integration policies, programs and practices in San Diego.
2. Increase and diversify financing models to meet the diverse needs of newcomers, to sustain integration systems and to cultivate partnerships.
3. Highlight stories of immigrants and welcoming communities through strategy convenings, agenda-setting in regional conversations and cultural celebrations.
4. Use data and evaluate measures to improve policies and practices on immigration integration.

## Economic Opportunity:

5. Facilitate career advancement of immigrant workers through job placement, rights protection, inclusive recruitment, upskilling and re-credentialing.
6. Promote immigrant entrepreneurship and support immigrant-owned businesses.
7. Promote financial literacy among newcomer communities.
8. Ensure housing stability and reduce barriers toward homeownership.

## Education:

9. Remove barriers to existing education programs and expand family engagement and support.
10. Enhance multicultural K-12 education and increase supportive services for newcomer students.
11. Increase professional development and deepen partnerships between school districts and immigrant community organizations.

## Inclusive Access:

12. Expand language access and ensure services are user-friendly and culturally-responsive.
13. Advance civil rights and eliminate unscrupulous practices.
14. Increase mobility and usage of public transportation.

## Civic Engagement:

15. Increase civic participation among new and aspiring Americans.
16. Create infrastructure to build and sustain civic engagement increase naturalizations.
17. Develop immigrant and refugee leaders.

## Safe and Connected Communities:

18. Foster trust and communications between public safety departments and immigrant residents.
19. Increase capacity of law enforcement to serve multilingual and multicultural communities.
20. Facilitate community-building among native-born and foreign-born residents.







# CROSS-SECTOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

## Goals

- Institutionalize, finance and celebrate the work of immigrant integration in local systems.
- Advocate for, advance, monitor and evaluate immigrant-friendly policies, programs and practices throughout the region that foster an inclusive culture and welcoming environment for immigrants and refugees.

## Recommendations

### 1. LEADERSHIP: Create the Office for Immigrant Advancement (OIA) to institutionalize and elevate immigrant integration policies, programs and practices in San Diego.<sup>1</sup>

#### Scope:

- Welcome newcomers and facilitate successful integration of immigrants and refugees into San Diego's civic, economic and social fabric.
- Foster positive interactions between native-born and foreign-born residents.

#### Structure:

- Within the first year of the strategic plan (fiscal year 2020), with expansion of budget in subsequent years as proven to be effective:
  - Appoint a senior advisor on immigrant integration.
  - Form a permanent cross-sector task force by building on the Welcoming San Diego stakeholders.
  - Fund additional personnel, fellows, interns and programs via municipal budget, philanthropic and intergovernmental resources.

#### Functions:

- Provide leadership and coordination for a broad range of stakeholders to identify and implement common aspirations and strategies that further advance the region for all residents.
- Promote, assess and strengthen the contributions of New Americans through communications, leadership development and civic engagement initiatives.
- Coordinate and streamline services that reduce barriers for immigrants and refugees and build relationships with various public and private systems and institutions to advocate for immigrants' needs and interests.
- Evaluate and improve the implementation of language access, translation, and interpretation processes for City services and other key systems.
- Convene regular ethnic media roundtables with the Mayor and City Councilmembers to dialogue directly with non-English constituents.
- Represent and promote San Diego's immigrant communities and immigrant integration practices in national coalitions (Cities for Citizenship, Cities for Action, U.S. Conference of Mayors), certifications processes (Certified Welcoming Cities) and conferences (National Immigrant Integration Conference).

2. **FINANCE: Increase and diversify financing models to meet the diverse needs of newcomers, to sustain integration systems, and to cultivate partnerships.**<sup>2</sup>

- Launch a fund comprised of resources from public, private and philanthropic sectors to provides grants and microloans toward immediate immigrant integration goals (0–3 years) in language acquisition, job-readiness, re-credentialing, essential social and legal services – with local government providing grants, policy direction and oversight.
- Collaborate with banks, social impact investors and philanthropy on increasing funding toward later stage of immigrant integration (3–10 years): entrepreneurial capital, higher education loans, and naturalization assistance for individuals; and capital for sustaining immigrant-serving organizations and growing immigrant-owned businesses.
- Introduce “migrant lens investing” to San Diego-based investors as a process that incorporates migrant issues into responsible investment and impact investment analysis to enhance investment decision-making.
- Establish pay-for-performance mechanisms such as social impact bonds to inject new investment and innovations in immigrant integration.

3. **NARRATIVE: Highlight stories of immigrants and welcoming communities through strategy convenings, agenda-setting in regional conversations and cultural celebrations.**

- Convene region-wide summit for stakeholders to discuss strategies, share best practices and collaborate on shared goals.
- Ensure immigrant integration is a topic of focus in existing regional discussions such as economic development, education, health, philanthropy and planning.
- Create region-wide marquee event that celebrates the accomplishments of immigrants and refugees in the areas of entrepreneurship, social impact, education and international engagement.
- Create a festival and/or a series of cultural events, storytelling projects, community dialogues, place-making designs and art installations that highlight the immigrant heritage of San Diego’s neighborhoods and communities, especially during Immigrant Heritage Month & World Refugee Day (June), Welcoming Week/Citizenship Day (September), International Migrants Day (December) and naturalization ceremonies.<sup>3</sup>
- Host national conferences to welcome immigrant integration practitioners to San Diego and learn best practices from around the world (i.e., National Immigrant Integration Conference, Metropolis North America Migration Policy Forum, Welcoming America convenings).

4. **KNOWLEDGE: Leverage data and implement evaluation measures to improve policies and practices on immigrant integration**

- Publish the annual snapshot of New Americans and their local economic contributions, building on the February 2018 report by New American Economy.<sup>4</sup>
- Track key indicators such as educational attainment among children of immigrants, professional integration of immigrants, workforce trends to better inform programs and policies.





- Learn comparative practices and policies among peer cities via tools such as the New American Economy Cities Index and other research initiatives.<sup>5</sup>
- Design attitudinal survey of immigrant well-being and the reception of immigrants among native-born communities (piloted during Welcoming San Diego planning process).
- Assign the future Office of Immigrant Advancement (OIA) to work with the City's Chief Data Officer, in collaboration with local research institutions on better data collection on San Diego's immigrants and refugees, benchmarking, evaluation and accountability measures.<sup>6</sup>



# ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

## Goals

- Advance self-sufficiency and wealth-building among immigrants and refugees to generate growth for the region through promoting workplace rights, better quality jobs, financial literacy, skills training, expanding entrepreneurship and inclusive hiring and contracting.
- Attract investment to San Diego and expand the global market opportunities of homegrown companies by leveraging the skills, cultural knowledge and homeland connections of international students, immigrant and refugee communities.

## Background and Community Input

In 2016, foreign-born residents in San Diego contributed \$54.3 billion to the county's gross domestic product (GDP) or 25.2 percent of all GDP. Furthermore, although San Diego's foreign-born population made up 24.1 percent of the county's overall population, they represented 28.4 percent of the county's employed labor force and 32.7 percent of the entrepreneurs. This translated into 62,299 immigrant entrepreneurs generating \$1.4 billion in business income for the county.



Still, obstacles prevent many immigrants and refugees from finding a home and comfortably settling upon arrival, limiting their employment options and hindering their entrepreneurial efforts. Often, the visa status of immigrants restricts their ability to work. Those who are able and willing to work do not always have access to, and employers often do not invest in, the appropriate portals for their skills and education. For example, there was an exodus of immigrant workers during the Great Recession in the construction industry, despite the ability of union apprentice programs to scale up to meet the growing needs of contractors. There are great opportunities to create partnerships to upskill immigrants and refugees to fill jobs in these key industries.



Through the community forums, immigrants, refugees and U.S.-born community members coincided on the desire to be economically self-sufficient, which requires financial literacy, full-time employment opportunities offering a living wage plus benefits and the pathway toward homeownership. However, the challenges of finding employment or job training, and the high costs of living that immigrant and native-born communities alike face, significantly impede those dreams. Immigrant workers are also disproportionately concentrated in low-wage service sectors, such as in hospitality and retail, and live in poverty; those in industries such as construction also confront hazardous and unsafe conditions. Overall, there was also an imminent fear of deportation among mixed-status households and individuals with tenuous status and not being accepted as part of the community they now call home.

The community forums also collected ideas on programs and strategies to remove the barriers immigrants encounter, to create economic opportunity for all, and to further promote a sense of belonging by helping immigrants and refugees achieve their dreams.

## Recommendations

### 5. Facilitate career advancement of immigrant workers through job placement, rights protection, inclusive recruitment, upskilling and re-credentialing.

#### Short-Term Strategies (Year 1-3):

- A. Partner with local employers, labor unions, community colleges, and immigrant-serving organizations to accelerate training, apprenticeships, credentialing and certification processes for foreign-trained professionals.<sup>7</sup>
- B. Provide incentives and support to businesses to hire immigrants and other individuals with barriers to employment such as people with disabilities or prior convictions via the City's Economic Development Department and ensure that businesses are utilizing incumbent-worker training funds for upskilling their workforce.<sup>8</sup>
- C. Deepen partnerships between local employers, labor unions and immigrant-serving organizations to expand connector programs and job-training programs that connect individuals to immediate-hire job opportunities, matches talent with established professionals, and ladders toward middle-skill jobs.<sup>9</sup>
- D. Ensure local Workforce Investment Opportunity Act (WIOA) planning processes and forums on Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) and Community Service Block Grants (CSBG) are inclusive of immigrant San Diegans and are investing in English learners, low-income workers and immigrant-serving CBOs.<sup>10</sup>
- E. Analyze public workforce program data to improve understanding of outreach effectiveness, outcomes and roadblocks for immigrant workers, and share lessons learned with workforce training providers and immigrant advocates to facilitate continued improvement.
- F. Identify opportunities to strengthen investments in vocational and technical English language classes and mentorship by supplementing or building on existing offerings in the adult education and higher education systems, apprenticeship programs, and day laborer centers.<sup>11</sup>
- G. Educate employers about workers' rights and the economic benefits of inclusive hiring and retention practices through union contracts or hiring halls.<sup>12</sup>

### **Long-Term Strategies (Year 3-5):**

- H. Expand and deepen partnerships between community colleges, labor unions and local employers to identify future industry needs and offer education, training and career bridge programs that enhance literacy and numeracy skills, technical skills and career coaching.
- I. Invest in wrap-around support services, such as childcare, transportation, living stipends, for immigrants and refugees to participate in workforce training and education programs.<sup>13</sup>
- J. Invest in proven strategies that can help more immigrant adults to upskill, such as Integrated Education and Training approaches offered through nonprofit organizations and community colleges.<sup>14</sup>
- K. Support collective bargaining rights for immigrant workers through contract negotiations, social safety ladder campaigns and smart justice initiatives to ensure fair workplace standards and quality jobs and require employers benefiting from public investment to pay living wages and provide health benefits.<sup>15</sup>
- L. Create a municipal fellowship program (two to six months paid internships) to provide opportunities for immigrants with foreign credentials, opportunity youth and other adults with skill gaps to gain valuable work experience.<sup>16</sup>
- M. Create pay-for-success finance mechanism to increase vocational ESOL and career pathways programming by leveraging government financing (social impact bonds), private capital (impact investors) and best practices (NGOs).<sup>17</sup>
- N. Promote and/or support legislation that recognizes and re-certifies foreign credentials that address industry-specific needs and talent shortages.<sup>18</sup>
- O. Create partnerships between economic development organizations, immigration lawyers and universities to better retain immigrant and international students with postsecondary and advanced degrees by training employers on recruiting global talent, and by providing immigration, cross-cultural and career resources to students.<sup>19</sup>

## **Promote immigrant entrepreneurship and support immigrant-owned businesses**

### **Short-Term Strategies (Year 1-3):**

- A. Expand workshops to provide navigation and hands-on support services to immigrant and refugee entrepreneurs, such as business planning, validation, bringing businesses from idea to implementation, access to capital, legal compliance, intellectual property and marketing through collaboration between small business development centers and immigrant-serving organizations.<sup>20</sup>
- B. Develop a database of immigrant-owned small- and medium-enterprise (SMEs) in the region to quantify the impact, attract investment, facilitate business-to-business partnerships, expand import/export capacity and reach diversity procurement goals of large-scale and public institutional buyers of goods and services.
- C. Establish start-up and SME growth funds and community-based financing options that provides capital for immigrant entrepreneurs through partnerships between local financial institutions and existing City and county revolving loan programs.<sup>21</sup>
- D. Educate immigrant workers on California SB 1159, which allows individuals to use an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number instead of a Social Security Number to apply for an occupational license – an important tool for entrepreneurs or independent contractors.



### Long-Term Strategies (Year 3-5):

- E. Launch business incubator and/or accelerator for foreign-born entrepreneurs, and work with planners, commissions and local business improvement districts to expand “international/cultural corridors” and start-up rows to create place-making opportunities, stimulate immigrant businesses and expand multicultural products and services on main streets.<sup>22</sup>
- F. Expand the City’s existing investment via its Economic Development Department that offers training and technical assistance for microenterprises in immigrant communities; monitor and ensure proper investments to areas of San Diego that have been designated as Opportunity Zones by the U.S. Department of Treasury.
- G. Create a roundtable for business-to-business mentorship for immigrant business owners to understand the San Diego market and best practices, develop employment referrals pathways, and connect legal and financial services for entrepreneurs.<sup>23</sup>
- H. Identify a local university partner as the anchor for Global Entrepreneur-in-Residence (Global EIR) program to retain skilled immigrants and international graduates of San Diego’s universities and generate regional economic growth and create jobs.<sup>24</sup>
- I. Prioritize immigrant- and refugee-owned (along with minority, women and LGBT-owned) small businesses for contracting opportunities for city and county business and projects.



## 7. Promote financial literacy among newcomer communities

### Short-Term Strategies:

- A. Expand educational opportunities for newcomers, such as seminars, radio shows and mentorship programs on financial literacy – from filing taxes to sending remittances safely, to saving for education and homeownership, to applying for loans.<sup>25</sup>
- B. Partner with high school teachers and adult basic education and ESOL instructors to add personal finance lessons or courses to the curriculum.
- C. Expand educational and legal assistance for entrepreneurs and small-business owners to build credit, conduct business planning, and secure insurance and other business needs.<sup>26</sup>





### Long-Term Strategies:

- D. Continue partnerships between community-based organizations, financial institutions, public agencies to offer free checking accounts for those who are unbanked, to educate immigrants to avoid high-risk lenders and to facilitate wealth-building and asset protection for low- to moderate- income families.<sup>27</sup>

## 8. Ensure housing stability and reduce barriers toward homeownership

### Short-Term Strategies (Year 1-3):

- A. Design and implement an outreach plan to guide new residents about existing home buyer resources and programs, and homeowner and renters' rights and responsibilities.
- B. Utilize Individual Development Accounts through existing federal programs or credit unions to assist in securing utilities, build credit, save toward homeownership and access sound homeownership counseling.
- C. Ensure immigrant tenants are protected from deportation threats and prevent landlords from taking any action based on immigration status of a tenant, prospective tenant, occupant, in compliance with California AB291 (Immigrant Tenant Protection Act) and California AB299 (Hiring of real property: immigration or citizenship status).
- D. Provide incentives to landlords granting leases to new immigrant and refugee residents.

### Long-Term Strategies (Year 3-5):

- E. Integrate factors such as immigrants' residential patterns, spatial integration, business corridors, distance to jobs and cultural resources in decision-making processes regarding planning, land use, housing and mobility decision



# EDUCATION

## Goals

- Enable educators and administrators to support intergenerational success, college readiness and completion, family engagement and lifelong learning.
- Create educational environments where immigrant heritage and cultures are embraced.

## Background and Community Input

Close to half (46.6 percent) of San Diego County's children are living in an immigrant family, and of all the children enrolled in public schools, a little over one in five are English language learners (ELL) (or 111,284 as of 2016). Schools are among the most important and most accessible places where U.S. and foreign-born families interact and they often serve as the primary point of reception for newcomer families. This dynamic was demonstrated throughout our community forums held at San Diego public schools, where foreign-born and U.S.-born families came to participate. From these residents, we learned that immigrant parents' dreams are often tied to their children's opportunities to quality education. There are also desires for children to meaningfully connect to the culture and heritage of their parents and grandparents, and to become competitive in a globalizing world. In San Diego, there are also unique needs to groups such as trans-border youth who are U.S. citizens living in Mexico and attending school in the United States, and children in refugee and asylee families who might have experienced trauma and the interruption or lack of formal education.

Community forum participants, many of whom are parents at the San Diego Unified and San Ysidro school districts, pointed out large barriers such as language and culture gaps that prevent or discourage them from engaging in school activities, unknown or lack of coordinated programs for the parents to learn English and professional skills, and for some, the threat of immigration enforcement and fear of bullying and cultural insensitivity.

Residents would like to see more partnerships with cultural, civic and other community-based organizations to invest in the success of immigrant parents, and for school districts to provide more resources toward cultural responsiveness, English language learners and pedagogy that values different cultures and languages, curriculum and programs to address and prevent issues of prejudice and bullying, and resources that address the social-emotional needs of children and their parents.

## Recommendations

### 9. Remove barriers to existing education programs for children and adults and expand family engagement and support.

#### Short-term strategies (Year 1-3):

- A. Convene leaders from K-12 school districts, private and charter schools, and higher and continuing education to strategize on immigrant integration objectives in the local education system.
- B. Promote best practices in multicultural family engagement, parental leadership development, and intergenerational programming to encourage appreciation of family history and culture.<sup>28</sup>
- C. Support and partner with First 5 San Diego to encourage immigrant parents to read to their children in the language they most comfortable with, and to promote school readiness, social-emotional well-being and family engagement in health and education systems.



- D. Utilize public libraries as hubs for adult learners to access information and referral services such as immigration and legal services, voter guides, and classes for English and citizenship, and expand programming such as naturalization ceremonies, computer skills training, learning lounges for career mentoring and job search, citizenship corners, storytelling workshops for immigrants, and art exhibits and film series that showcase immigration stories.<sup>29</sup>
- E. Promote cross-border engagement with Tijuana-based parents of San Diego students by convening teacher trainings, parent-teacher conferences and other youth development workshops, partnering San Diego educators with Tijuana's CBOs, educators, and places of worship.
- F. Increase immigrant access to higher education through readiness programs, college visits, and admission tests and application preparation, and increase first-generation college students' degree completions through support in academics social-emotional health, and familial and peer relationships.<sup>30</sup>
- G. Collaborate with adult education consortia funded under California's Adult Education Program to identify opportunities to improve immigrant access to, and success in adult ESOL and other foundational skills classes.

**Long-term strategies (Year 3-5):**

- H. Increase budget appropriation toward initiatives that engages and empowers immigrant and refugee parents and interpretation at key meetings and events at the school districts.
- I. Improve access to and completion of adult education for immigrants to support their transition to community college or employment through adult education, labor union programs and community colleges.
- J. Provide technical and financial assistance for immigrant caretakers to open and maintain licensed home-based childcare programs to expand culturally-responsive and accessible early education for immigrant communities.<sup>31</sup>
- K. Grant the right to vote for noncitizen San Diegan adults for local school and community college board elections, and actively recruit members from local immigrant and refugee communities to university advisory boards.





## 10. Enhance multicultural curriculum in K-12 education and increase supportive services for newcomer students.

### Short-term strategies (Year 1-3):

- A. Develop curriculum that includes civics, immigration history, ethnic studies, religious literacy, trauma, cross-cultural competency and anti-bias and tolerance education in line with Common Core social-emotional and college and career readiness standards.<sup>32</sup>
- B. Enhance and coordinate year-round tutoring, newcomer orientation, counseling and behavioral health services, and create a directory and schedule of these programs.
- C. Enhance and expand summer academies for students who have experienced trauma, family separation and/or interrupted education to develop social and emotional skills, prepare for entering school and practice leadership and cross-cultural communications.<sup>33</sup>
- D. Promote the San Diego Promise program (free two-year tuition to first-time full-time students) and other free and low-cost programs to immigrant residents through the San Diego Community College system.

### Long-term strategies (Year 3-5):

- E. Align immigrant integration goals with San Diego's Local Control & Accountability Plan, Adult Education Consortium, county-level goals and statewide global education and language learning objectives.
- F. Establish a pipeline for immigrant and refugee adolescents to complete certificates in ESOL/VESOL, high school diploma/equivalency and career training with additional numeracy and literacy training and wrap around supportive services to equip opportunity youth and students with interrupted formal education.
- G. Graduate a majority of San Diego's students with the State Seal of Biliteracy.
- H. Align school districts' goals with the Global California 2030 initiative, encourage heritage language acquisition for early learners and increase the number and range of world language programs and dual-language immersion programs.



11. Increase professional development and deepen partnerships between district and immigrant community organizations.

**Short-term strategies (Year 1-3):**

- A. Enhance professional development training for educators on being allies and supporters of immigrant students and families.
- B. Partner with PTAs, libraries, recreation centers and other community spaces on cultural events, immigrant integration workshops, English/citizenship corners, foreign language materials and multi-generational programming for immigrant families.

**Long-term strategies (Year 3-5):**

- D. Increase school districts' budgets for promoting professional development opportunities in cultural responsiveness, trauma, cultural humility, anti-bias education and immigrant family engagement.
- E. Work with administrators and school boards to make "welcoming" an intersectional value that creates inclusive environments for other marginalized or vulnerable youth such as ethnic, racial and religious minorities, individuals with disabilities, LGBTQ and non-binary students.





# INCLUSIVE ACCESS

## Goals

- Ensure immigrant residents have access to City services, health care and legal services by actively removing barriers such as language, culture, awareness and feasibility.
- Build trust by reducing fear and exploitative practices, and by advancing rights-education and access to safe and affordable legal services.

## Background and Community Input

Community members shared that while there are a number of excellent services available for newcomers in the San Diego region, immigrants and refugees are not always able to access the services they need. This happens for several reasons, including: language barriers, lack of reliable transportation to easily get to where the services are offered, not having a centralized location where people can go to access services, not having enough information about existing services, insufficient outreach and fear of deportation. Additionally, legal status prevents some individuals from being able to access certain services.

Residents also expressed a desire for both City-sponsored and nonprofit services, and help being able to navigate the services that exist. In particular, community members mentioned that they wanted more of these types of services: health and medical insurance, mental health services and trauma informed care, affordable housing, financial, employment and job skills training, food, transportation, municipal ID, ESL classes and legal assistance (including help applying for citizenship).

To address the barriers that community members raised, the city should consider focusing on activities that expand language access, make it easier for people to get to services, effectively outreach to make sure people have information on how to access city services, build community trust and expand services available to immigrants and refugees in our city.

## Recommendations

### 12. Expand language access across and ensure services are user-friendly and culturally-responsive

#### Short-term strategies (Year 1-3):

- A. Assess current implementation and effectiveness of language access policies for threshold languages and identify additional languages and culturally-responsive methods to ensure meaningful access for under-reached populations.<sup>34</sup>
- B. Create printed guides in multiple languages, mobile application and/or tech-enabled kiosks across region to increase awareness and usage of services more accessible by immigrants and refugees.<sup>35</sup>
- C. Increase and update languages needed in frontline City services and develop or consolidate language access plans and programs across key agencies.
- D. Utilize public library materials budget to expand collections of popular and informational materials in languages of immigrant and refugee populations, in addition to English.

### **Long-term strategies (Year 3–5):**

- E. Incentivize current municipal employees to complete language and cultural responsiveness courses as part of their professional development and increase hiring of multilingual and immigrant staff in frontline city service agencies.
- F. Recruit and retain personnel from cultures of refugee and immigrant communities who are bi/multilingual by creating scholarships for immigrant and refugee students to study health sciences, social work, and human services and incentives to fill the cultural and linguistic gaps of local service providers.
- G. Publish annual compliance reports that include recommendations for continued improvement and individual score cards for relevant agencies; ensure City practices meet standards of a certified Welcoming City.
- H. Work with county, state and federal offices to help expand services available to immigrants and refugees in our region (including but not limited to healthcare, mental health services, transportation, housing, and legal defense and immigration services.)
- I. Promote affordable housing guidance and renter rights in targeted languages and ensure a stronger immigrant voice on the City’s housing and community development strategic planning processes.

### **13. Advance civil rights and eliminate unscrupulous practices.**

#### **Short-term strategies (Year 1–3):**

- A. Advocate for policies that help protect and advance the rights of immigrants and refugees at the county, state and federal level. Oppose policies that target or profile immigrants and endanger their status.
- B. Accept consular IDs and other forms of foreign citizenship documents across city agencies.
- C. Centralize and offer safe immigration and legal information through accessible locations, such as public libraries.<sup>36</sup>

#### **Long-term strategies (Year 3–5):**

- F. Increase or establish dedicated funding for immigration services such as naturalization assistance, legal defense, emergency shelter, services for migrant children and families, forensic documentation for asylum cases, and know-your-rights workshops.<sup>37</sup>
- G. Increase coordination between local, state and federal law enforcement to address fraudulent actors and legal practices in the community; initiate multilingual community outreach efforts from City Attorney and/or District Attorney to educate the public and identify cases.<sup>38</sup>
- H. Create a San Diego municipal ID for individuals who have barriers to obtaining existing government-issued identification, such as individuals experiencing homeless, undocumented immigrants, youth, elderly, and the formerly incarcerated – to improve access to banking and public services, and offer benefits and discounts to transit, library and cultural institutions.<sup>39</sup>



#### 14. Increase mobility and usage of public transportation.

##### Short-Term strategies (Year 1-3):

- A. Partner with public transportation agencies to create more route maps, user guides and workshops available in different languages.
- B. Provide affordable drivers training and assistance in purchasing new vehicles through matched savings programs or other loan products for newcomers.
- C. Partner with ride-sharing and mobility companies on guaranteed ride home incentives for New American families who are reliant on public-transit for their new jobs and medical appointments.
- D. Provide immigrants and refugees with free bus and trolley passes for the initial period of their arrival as they become familiar with their commutes.
- E. Offer a discount bus pass option for adult education students through MTS for adults enrolled in courses in citizenship, ESOL, VESOL, high school diploma/equivalency and career training.







are a very smart to know this  
very many things at the same

You know the whole thing  
we are very smart to know  
very many things at the same



# CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

## Goals

- Create opportunities for immigrants to participate in civic life through developing leaders and active listening by decision-making bodies.
- Boost naturalization and voter registration rates and deepen involvement in democratic processes among foreign-born residents.

## Background and Community Input

Throughout the community forums, more than a dozen broad thematic groupings of barriers to active civic engagement by immigrant and refugee communities were identified. Chief among these barriers in order of prevalence are: 1) Language and Communication; 2) Fear; 3) Lack of Information and Resources; 4) Racism and Lack of Inclusion; 5) Limited Cultural Competency and Cultural Differences; and, 6) Family Life. A primary thread running through most of these is lack of information among many in the community coupled with a lack of education, awareness, training and technical assistance in all sectors including within government, community-based organizations, the greater population and the immigrant and refugee communities. Consequently, many of the recommended strategies are geared toward overcoming a lack of information and increasing education and awareness on the civic engagement needs and opportunities for San Diego's immigrant and refugee communities. The policy options point to establishing the infrastructure to build and sustain the civic engagement of immigrants and refugees in San Diego.

## Recommendations

### 15. Increase civic participation among new and aspiring Americans.

#### Short-term strategies (Year 1-3):

- A. Create geographic and virtual hubs for newcomers to access information and programs, such as newcomer orientation classes, welcome packets and resource lists in multiple languages.<sup>40</sup>
- B. Support the County Registrar of Voters to provide multilingual and targeted voter registration drives for immigrant and refugee communities and promote automatic voter registration and mail-in ballots, in compliance with California AB 918 (Voting for All Act).
- C. Partner with existing community organizations to increase voter education, outreach and mobilization for naturalized citizens.
- D. Expand the City's partnership with New American Workforce to offer more workplace-based citizenship and legal assistance.<sup>41</sup>
- E. Convene regular meetings between government officials and immigrant and refugee communities and increase options for weekend and evening meetings and in neighborhoods.
- F. Supplement state funding for outreach in hard-to-count communities to create awareness and encourage a full count of our region in the 2020 Census.

## 16. Create infrastructure to build and sustain civic engagement increase naturalizations.

### Short-term strategies (Year 1-3):

- A. Establish a city office to oversee support and engagement with immigrants and refugees.<sup>42</sup>
- B. Bridge local nonprofits, labor unions, faith-based organizations, consulate offices and other entities to collectively increase the immigrant voice and civic participation.
- C. Hold town halls with current elected officials and subsequent events for candidates that focus on immigrant and refugee concerns and local immigrant integration policies.

### Long-term strategies (Year 3-5):

- D. Grant non-citizens the right to vote in local elections and serve on boards and commissions.<sup>43</sup>
- E. Dedicated and sustained public funding to promote the benefits of naturalization and New American voter education.
- F. Partner with financial institutions and CBOs to provide microloans and grants toward naturalization and other immigration applications.<sup>44</sup>

## 17. Develop immigrant and refugee leaders.

### Short-term strategies (Year 1-3):

- A. Foster immigrant participation in public debates and public decision-making by offering translated outreach materials, interpretation services, and transportation to community hearings, neighborhood planning groups, town councils and town halls.
- B. Increase recruitment of immigrant and refugee leaders to existing leadership development programs across generational groups, systems and sectors.<sup>45</sup>
- C. Create a civics academy to orient newcomers, develop New American leaders and foster network of community advocates, cross-cultural ambassadors and citizen diplomats.<sup>46</sup>
- D. Create training and fellowship program for community ambassadors on how city and county governments work in order for them to help explain the civil rights and civic responsibilities within their community, with special focus on under reached areas such as San Ysidro and newest refugee arrivals.<sup>47</sup>

### Long-term strategies (Year 3-5):

- E. Remove linguistic and logistical barriers for immigrants and refugees to serve on boards and commissions in municipal, county and regional bodies to reflect the make-up of immigrants in the city (more than 25 percent), and to ensure that boards and commissions prioritize diversity in demographic background, experience, gender, orientation, religion, race and national origin.
- F. Build pipeline of first- and second-generation New Americans candidates for local elected office, and train candidates on messaging, alliance building, fundraising and embracing one's immigrant heritage.<sup>48</sup>
- G. Activate diaspora engagement in their homeland's civic affairs and develop immigrant citizen diplomats through exchanges and visits with their homeland's diplomatic, business and civic leaders.



# SAFE AND CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

## Goals

- Connect host communities and newcomers toward greater understanding, belonging, and resilience.
- Foster trust between migrants and first responders and create shared goals and spaces in neighborhoods toward public safety and greater capacity for rapid and emergency responses.

## Background and Community Input

We recognize that the degree of safety (real or perceived), connectedness and resilience depend on how neighbors communicate with one another, how residents relate to law enforcement and first responders, especially for mixed-status households and communities with different cultural, linguistic and religious understandings of these notions and relationship with established institutions.

The data received from the community input sessions showed that a primary program that's needed is one focused on Police and Community Engagement. Our City must prioritize trust-building between immigrants and law enforcement to foster communities that feel connected and safe. Two geographic areas of concern were particularly highlighted: First, in the San Ysidro neighborhood, many expressed dismay at lack of response from law enforcement indicating greater need for resources in the area. Second, members of the committee repeatedly heard that interactions with police and law enforcement occur on public transit.

Throughout the community input process, “access to neighborhood policing” became a common theme, paired with barriers such as people feeling that “they don’t know how to speak up” to institutions of authority. Beyond the functions of public engagement remains a deep “lack of understanding the law” here in San Diego and how it may contrast with laws from countries of origin.

To overcome barriers to integration, many respondents in focus groups suggested mentorship and creation of meaningful connections with individual police officers and ensuring training programs to ensure there are “officers that are approachable.”



Above all, there was feedback indicating a greater need for immigrant and refugee communities to have a sense of belonging, ownership and rooted identity in their neighborhoods. This includes growing a better rapport between groups and law enforcement communities, but also ensuring that diverse cultures and stories are embraced and celebrated, and functions of government place members of the community in places of authority and leadership.

## Recommendations

### 18. Foster trust and communications between public safety departments and immigrant residents.

#### Short-term strategies (Year 1–3):

- A. Uphold and emphasize City Council policy on racial non-discrimination and the commitment by City Attorney and San Diego Police Department (SDPD) to protect immigrants.
- B. Ensure local police departments' compliance with California SB54 (California Values Act) and AB 2792 (TRUTH Act) by submitting an annual report on joint law enforcement task forces and publishing the report in multiple languages to increase public transparency and accessibility.
- C. Enhance data collection, officer trainings, multicultural messaging on hate crime prevention and response efforts, led by the City Attorney in partnership with civil rights organizations and other government and law enforcement agencies.<sup>49</sup>
- D. Coordinate with local government agencies and community-based organizations on multilingual outreach and support for disaster preparedness and other emergency responses.<sup>50</sup>
- E. Partner with immigrant and refugee CBOs, faith-based organizations and places of worship to create opportunities for discussions and listening circles with local elected officials to understand community concerns as it relates to public safety.<sup>51</sup>
- F. Co-design more Coffee with a Cop initiatives among immigrant and refugee communities to provide visibility of law enforcement and foster two-way communication.

#### Long-term strategies (Year 3–5):

- G. Update the SDPD policy to end collaboration with U.S. Department of Homeland Security agencies, including but not limited to Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Homeland Security Investigations and U.S. Customs and Border Protection.
- H. Fill vacancies on relevant boards and commissions, advisory panels and community groups with qualified nominees from immigrant and refugee communities to improve trust, cross-cultural communication and restorative justice practices.

### 19. Increase capacity of law enforcement to serve multilingual and multicultural communities.

#### Short-term strategies (Year 1–3):

- A. Communicate the updated SDPD policy related to immigration in multiple languages, which states the department shall never inquire about immigration status directly to all SDPD personnel and create penalties for officers who violate any of the provisions outlined in the policy.
- B. Fund the translation of local policy into other languages to ensure greater participation and transparency to all communities, and create PSAs featuring representatives from the immigrant and refugee community to improve understanding of local law enforcement's role.
- C. Promote rights, and review and enhance policies that protect and services for foreign-born individuals who have experienced domestic violence (U-visas), human trafficking (T-visas), family separation, hate crimes, home-country persecution, torture, et cetera.
- D. Prosecute fraudulent actors and recover victims' losses from exploitative practices (i.e., unlawful practice of law, unlawfully filling out immigration paperwork for applicants, charging enormously high costs.)



**Long-term strategies (Year 3–5):**

- E. Enhance and incentivize cultural responsiveness, restorative justice, contemplative practices, multilingual outreach and anti-bias trainings for entire law enforcement system.
- F. Increase hiring of bi/multilingual officers and outreach personnel and offer public safety career information in multiple languages to recruit qualifying candidates among immigrant among refugee communities.
- G. Design police and fire academy classes to include cultural responsiveness, while designing VESOL classes to supplement the new public safety recruit onboarding.

**20. Facilitate community-building among native-born and foreign-born residents.****Short-term strategies (Year 1–3):**

- A. Expand welcoming committees and newcomer family mentors across neighborhoods, places of worship and community-based organizations.
- B. Expand outreach, volunteer opportunities and cultural offerings for newcomers and newly-naturalized citizens from parks and recreational services, museums and other arts institutions.<sup>52</sup>
- C. Increase cross-cultural programming in libraries, local media outlets, theater companies and comedy troops to foster storytelling, build expressive and improvisational skills of newcomers.<sup>53</sup>
- D. Strengthen rapid response networks and referrals to essential services for displaced migrants, survivors of trafficking and asylum seekers.<sup>54</sup>
- E. Partner with groups with extended experiences abroad such as service members and veterans, members of the Peace Corps community, development professionals and retired diplomats to orient newcomers and engage immigrant and refugee communities.
- F. Organize a “San Diego World Cup” soccer tournament of neighborhood-based teams with a mixture of immigrant and native-born players in various age groups.<sup>55</sup>

**Long-term strategies (Year 3–5):**

- G. Partner and equip civic, faith and community leaders to convey a vision of shared future and collective identities to respond to the anxieties stemming from religious and cultural differences, economic competition and segregation.<sup>56</sup>
- H. Celebrate the heritage of indigenous San Diegans by observing Indigenous Peoples Day in the City of San Diego on every second Monday of October, using indigenous place names in City communications and honoring Native American culture in local schools.
- I. Create differentiated physical spaces for newcomers that foster belonging and peer-mentorship, accommodate cultural and family needs and provide safe and consistent meeting venues.
- J. Partner with local arts and culture councils to commission public art installations, murals and performances that highlight immigrant narratives and celebrate global cultures and San Diego’s immigrant heritage.<sup>57</sup>

# FOOTNOTES

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- <sup>5</sup> Example: New American Economy Cities Index (<https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/interactive-index>)
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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We deeply appreciate the organizations and individuals for their contributions to the plan, and the hundreds of community members who shared stories and ideas.

We especially thank the teams at New American Economy and Welcoming America for their coaching, expertise and funding. We are grateful for the generous support from the California Endowment, and the anchor institutions that have made this initiative possible.





# PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Alliance San Diego	San Diego Community College District
Anti-Defamation League	San Diego Continuing Education
Business for Good	San Diego County Community Action Partnership
The California Endowment	San Diego Diplomacy Council
California Immigration Policy Center	San Diego Grantmakers
Center on Policy Initiatives	San Diego Immigrant Rights Consortium
City of San Diego	San Diego Mesa College
CONNECT	San Diego Peace Corps Association
Consulate of Mexico in San Diego	San Diego Public Library
Christ Ministry Center (UMC)	San Diego Refugee Forum
Critical Refugee Studies Collective	San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce
Employee Rights Center	San Diego Regional Economic Development Corp.
Flourish San Diego	San Diego Unified School District
Global Immersion Project	San Diego Volunteer Lawyers Project
Hope for San Diego	San Diego Welcome Back Center
Institute for Local Government	San Diego Workforce Partnership
International Rescue Committee	SEIU Local 221
Jewish Family Service of San Diego	Survivors of Torture, International
Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice, Kroc School, University of San Diego	Trans-Border Institute, Kroc School, University of San Diego
Leichtag Foundation	UC San Diego Center for Comparative Immigration Studies
Mid-City CAN	UC San Diego Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies
Mission Driven Finance	UC San Diego Yankelovich Center on Social Science Research
National Immigration Forum	United Nations Association – San Diego
New American Economy	USC Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration
New Americans Museum	Welcoming America
New Neighbor Relief	YMCA of San Diego County
Project Concern International (PCI)	
RISE San Diego	
Safe Harbors Network	
San Diego Building & Construction Trades Council	

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Photography provided by the San Diego Union-Tribune/ZUMA Press





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