

DEFINING IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION

Immigrant integration is a complex concept that is fundamentally tied to the ongoing debate about the role of immigrants in our society and our different visions of a thriving America. GCIR's Immigrant Integration Framework builds on the vision that the United States, to remain strong and prosperous, must continue to be the land of opportunity where people of all colors, cultural backgrounds, and walks of life can put down roots, build a better life, and become contributing members of society.

Guided by this vision, GCIR defines immigrant integration as a dynamic, two-way process in which newcomers and the receiving society work together to build secure, vibrant, and cohesive communities.

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We believe that integration should be an intentional process that engages and transforms all community stakeholders, enriching our social, economic, and civic life over time. Mutual responsibility and benefits, multi-sector involvement, and multi-strategy approach are the cornerstones of GCIR's

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Immigrant Integration Framework. We believe these elements are critical to any effort to integrate immigrants.

GCIR utilizes the term “integration” and not “assimilation” to emphasize respect for and incorporation of differences and the need for mutual adaptation. “Integration” also reflects an appreciation of diversity instead of the homogeneity that “assimilation” has come to connote.¹ In addition, the literal meaning of integration—combining and coordinating separate elements to create a harmonious, interrelated whole—captures our belief in the importance of immigrant integration to our society.

1. Fix, Michael, Wendy Zimmerman, and Jeff Passel. 2001. *The Integration of Immigrant Families in the United States*. Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute.

THEORIES ON IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION: A LOOK AT THE RESEARCH

GCIR's definition of immigrant integration builds on the rich but sometimes conflicting social-science theories on how immigrants become members of U.S. society. “Assimilation” theory, first developed in the 1920s, originally posited that newcomers both absorb and influence elements of the receiving society, with the two becoming more like each other over time. The concept later became known as the “melting pot.” Although developed in part to counteract the “Americanization” movement of the 1920s, this theory over time became criticized for assuming that the subordinate immigrant group could only achieve upward mobility by becoming more like the dominant group.²

Beginning in the 1960s, a number of scholars began trying to explain the incomplete assimilation of many groups, documenting that lingering

discrimination and structural and institutional barriers to equal access to employment constituted obstacles to complete assimilation. This approach became known as the “ethnic-disadvantage” model.³

Most recently, Alejandro Portes and Rubén Rumbaut have advanced a more nuanced approach: “segmented assimilation.” Combining elements of the assimilation and ethnic-disadvantage models, this theory suggests that while many immigrants will find different pathways to mainstream status, others will find such pathways blocked and come to view themselves as members of disadvantaged and racialized groups as a result.⁴

Frank Bean and Gillian Stevens, however, point out that segmented assimilation may inadvertently overemphasize negative outcomes. They note the transformation of the United States from a largely biracial, white majority-black minority society into

a multiracial, multiethnic society. This diversity may render racial and ethnic boundaries more permeable and less susceptible to stereotyping in the future, at the same time that economic mobility increasingly proceeds ahead of traditional measures of cultural assimilation.⁵

This movement, propelled by suspicion and fear, sought to induce newcomers to assimilate American speech, ideals, traditions, and ways of life.

2. Bean, Frank and Gillian Stevens. 2003. *America's Newcomers and the Dynamics of Diversity*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation and Alba and Nee. 2003. *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
3. Ibid.
4. Portes, Alejandro and Ruben Rumbaut. 2001. *Legacies: The Story of the Second Generation*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
5. Bean and Stevens, 2003.

MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY, MUTUAL CHANGE, MUTUAL BENEFITS

Throughout U.S. history, immigrants have been viewed—by themselves and others—as responsible for their own fate, with the classic generational transition from “peddler to plumber to professor”⁶ through tenacity, self-reliance, and hard work. In many respects, this responsibility still holds: The human, social, and financial capital immigrants bring with them or acquire are significant determinants of their pace of mobility in American society.

Successful integration, however, is not determined solely by the actions immigrants take and the resources they possess. The reception—supportive, neutral, or negative—they receive from the host community plays a critical role.

Integration is a two-way process in which newcomer and established residents share responsibility for the well-being of one another and of the broader community. Requiring change on the part of the immigrant and the receiving community, integration is a dynamic give-and-take process that takes place over time. In the ideal, it transforms both the newcomers and the receiving society, creating a new whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Through the integration process, the receiving community learns to respect the skills, languages, and cultures that newcomers bring and, simultaneously, play an active role in meeting their needs. Long-established residents eventually come to recognize immigrants as assets who contribute to the long-term vibrancy and prosperity of their community.

In responding to immigrants’ needs, however, receiving communities are unlikely to be able to provide the ideal level of support, constrained by factors such as limited financial resources, competing community needs, and lack of political will. Nor will receiving communities, with a deeply rooted set of existing values and norms, come to accept and value linguistic, cultural, and ethnic diversity overnight. Nevertheless, successful integration depends on a shift in the receiving community’s attitudes towards—and willingness to assist—newcomers.

Immigrants and refugees—and the organizations that represent them—also bear responsibility for integration. Newcomers must do their part to become contributing members of society by learning English, getting involved in their children’s education, sharing their cultures, and participating in democracy. Voicing concerns and ideas, working together with longtime residents toward common goals, and taking part in community decision making are all part of the immigrant integration experience.

At the same time, integration does not mean that immigrants must sever ties to their countries of birth nor abandon their cultures, traditions, values, and identities. For most newcomers, the initial focus upon arrival will be on day-to-day survival; it may take years for them to move from immediate survival to establish roots and become active in community life. For others, social and economic realities create formidable barriers to integration that may not be overcome until future generations.

DVD

Watch the DVD *Rain in a Dry Land: Learning about America*

Many immigrants and refugees arrive with little knowledge of everyday American life that most longtime residents take for granted. Sit in on a refugee orientation session in Kenya, where America-bound Somali-Bantus learn about high-rise buildings, how to use a stove, and what American law has to say about family behavior.



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6. Waldinger, Roger. 1997. “Immigrant Integration in the Post Industrial Metropolis: A View from the United States,” Metropolis First International Conference, Milan. August.

MULTI-SECTOR INVOLVEMENT

The engagement of all stakeholders in the newcomer and receiving communities, as well as those who bridge the two, is critical to the integration process. The stakeholder sectors identified in the chart below all have a self-interested stake in promoting immigrant integration.

Stakeholder groups need to work together to achieve a common understanding about immigrants' complex roles in our society; engage in candid,

ongoing discussions about prejudice, fear, and other realities facing their communities; and come to an agreement about shared community goals and the mutual responsibility that is required to achieve them. Only through this two-way process and with ongoing attention to integration can communities realize a win-win situation in which immigrant and native-born neighbors of different experiences, histories, and backgrounds can work together to build a shared community, now and in the future.

STAKEHOLDERS IN IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION

SECTOR/STAKEHOLDER GROUP

INTERESTS

PHILANTHROPY

Due to spreading demographic changes, immigration affects virtually every issue philanthropy seeks to influence, from health and education to rights and justice to democratic participation. To achieve their goals, foundations must take leadership in addressing the needs of newcomers and engaging them in efforts to develop solutions to community problems.

GOVERNMENT

Government is a key player in meeting community needs, providing resources to help individuals succeed and protecting those who are vulnerable. Helping newcomers achieve self-sufficiency and lead productive lives not only prevents strain on public resources but can increase tax revenues, economic productivity, and social and cultural vibrancy of the receiving community.

BUSINESS

Immigrants represent a growing segment of the workforce and the consumer base in the United States. In addition, their transnational ties and linguistic and cultural skills help U.S. companies compete in the global marketplace.

LABOR UNIONS

Unions have recently increased their organizing efforts in industries with a large share of immigrant workers. The involvement and leadership of immigrant workers are central to unions' ability to improve wages, benefits, and workplace conditions, as well as strengthen the broader labor movement.

FAITH-BASED INSTITUTIONS

Valuing human dignity and the worth of each individual, faith-based institutions have a vested interest in immigrant issues through their ministry and social-action work and because immigrants are an important segment of their constituencies.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Schools serve as a crucial point of contact for immigrant families and provide one of the best opportunities for newcomers to engage with other newcomer and established residents. The success of schools, particularly in communities with large foreign-born populations, depends in part on the academic achievements and social integration of the children of immigrants.

COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS

Responding to demographic changes, hospitals, social service providers, schools, and other community institutions have had to change the way they operate. Providing services that are linguistically accessible and culturally appropriate is now a must for communities with growing immigration populations.

IMMIGRANT AND ETHNIC COMMUNITIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

Social networks within the immigrant communities, as well as ethnic-based community organizations, are invaluable to newcomers trying to establish a new life. They often serve as a bridge between newcomers and the receiving community. Their interest is to connect immigrants to resources to establish a new life, so that immigrants, in turn, can contribute to the advancement of their communities.

MULTI-STRATEGY APPROACH

Immigrant integration efforts can draw upon myriad strategies for community building and social change that philanthropy have long supported. These strategies include but are not limited to direct services, capacity building, community outreach and education, leadership development, organizing, policy analysis and advocacy, legal assistance, research, communications, media, and litigation.

The combination of strategies depends on immigrants' needs, available resources, and the goals of the integration effort, among many other factors. For example, a new immigrant gateway experiencing an influx of newly arriving refugees may begin by assessing needs and then building the capacity of community organizations to respond to identified needs. A community struggling with racial and ethnic tensions might utilize community dialogues and media outreach to increase intergroup understanding. A state fighting anti-immigrant legislation may decide to deploy leadership development, organizing, advocacy, and communications strategies.

For foundations new to immigrant integration, supporting pilot projects is often a good starting point. This approach allows funders to test a strategy or a set of strategies before making a larger, longer-term commitment. Investing in funding collaboratives and other pooled funds is another good option.

"Where ought to be a major movement to integrate immigrants into our society. The focus should be both on making communities more receptive to immigrants, as well as encouraging immigrants to become better citizens and play a more active role in communities."

—Bill Hing, Professor of Law
University of California, Davis

It gives foundations an opportunity to explore a range of funding possibilities, learn from and develop relationships with experienced colleagues, and increase the impact of grant dollars.

PATHWAYS TO INTEGRATION

GCIR's Immigrant Integration Framework identifies six strategic pathways through which immigrants and the receiving community can work together to provide resources and opportunities and leverage the human capital that immigrants bring. These pathways are:

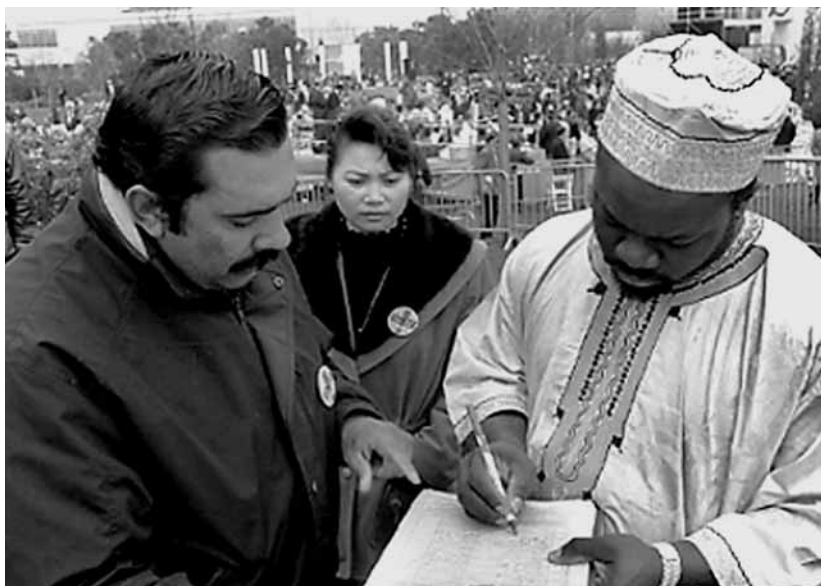
- Communitywide planning
- Language and education
- Health, well-being, and economic mobility
- Equal treatment and opportunity
- Cultural and social interaction
- Civic participation and citizenship

These pathways serve both as a tool for facilitating integration and as a means to assess whether integration is taking place successfully. They interact dynamically, each with the power to reinforce or weaken progress in the other areas. For example, language and education are highly correlated with economic mobility but are also a determining factor in health care access, citizenship and civic participation, and interaction with native-born residents. Similarly, unequal treatment can threaten not only economic mobility but also immigrants' ability to access critically needed services and to participate in democracy.

DVD

Watch the DVD *The New Americans: The Flores Family*

In this sequence, two determined Mexican kids adjust to life in rural Kansas by learning English and succeeding in school. But their mother, isolated and depressed, longs to be near relatives. The family must weigh the benefits of educational opportunities versus the comfort of being near their extended family.



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Mutual responsibility, again, is fundamental to successful integration. Whereas immigrants have the responsibility to become productive community members, the receiving society bears the responsibility to provide them the resources and opportunities they need to succeed. All stakeholders—individuals and institutions, public and private—play a contributing role in this endeavor.

- **Communitywide planning** creates intentional opportunities for immigrant and receiving communities to work together to identify barriers, develop policies, and implement programs that facilitate immigrant integration. Depending on specific circumstances, communitywide planning efforts can vary in terms of focus, scale, and scope. For instance, they can concentrate on a single integration issue (e.g., workforce integration for immigrant professionals) or address multiple concerns through multiple strategies (e.g., improving health care, education, and employment opportunities for immigrants). The need for such planning has never been more pressing, particularly because current U.S. immigration policies do not reflect the country's social, economic, and demographic realities and no national policy exists to support the integration process.

- **Language and education.** With most immigrants arriving with limited or moderate English skills, eliminating language barriers to services and providing opportunities to develop English proficiency are essential for successful integration. Acquisition of English leads to a higher standard of living as newcomers gain access to education and job training opportunities, as well as community services and institutions.

To uphold their end of the integration bargain, immigrants have the responsibility to learn English and partake in education opportunities to advance themselves and their families.



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Maintaining native-language competency is a strength they also contribute in light of today's transnational marketplace and global interdependence. Institutions in the receiving community, for their part, have the responsibility to offer quality English classes, ensure language access, and provide quality educational opportunities.

- **Health, well-being, and economic mobility.** Health care, employment, and other services and resources that promote economic mobility are essential for helping immigrants establish a foothold and contribute fully to society as workers, entrepreneurs, taxpayers, and community members. Economic mobility is a traditional indicator of the level of integration. Higher income is significant in its own right, but it also means access to other advantages, e.g., a house in a safer neighborhood with better schools, that improve family well-being and enhance economic outcomes.

In the context of health, well-being, and economic mobility, immigrants bear responsibility to become self-sufficient, support their families, and contribute to the economy by working, paying taxes, and starting new businesses. The receiving community, in turn, provides resources that support the ability of immigrant families to advance (e.g., job training, health care, child care, social safety-net programs, and access to credit).

- **Equal treatment and opportunity.** True opportunity is not possible without equal treatment. Concerns about immigration status, exploitation in the workplace, unfair treatment, and discrimination can severely undermine immigrants' ability to realize their full potential. Not having a level playing field for immigrants can also lower the quality of life and diminish opportunity for other community members. Therefore, fair laws and policies that promote equal treatment and opportunity are critical building blocks for successful integration—and for building a fair and humane society.

In the two-way integration process, immigrants must commit to being responsible, contributing community members and do their part to promote equal treatment and opportunity for all community members. In turn, the receiving society must ensure that laws and policies reflect core American values of fairness and opportunity, protect civil rights and liberties, and create opportunities for newcomers to contribute fully to American society.

- **Social and cultural interaction** is critically important to foster understanding, build trusting relationships, and lay the foundation for mutual engagement. Such interaction often can make or break the integration experience, either erecting roadblocks or paving a path towards integration.