

Promoting immigrant integration: Ideas for working together with your local officials

What is integration and why is it important?

Immigrant integration is a dynamic, two-way process in which newcomers and the receiving society work together to build a secure, vibrant and cohesive community. When everyone has the opportunity to freely engage in their community, the overall quality of life is improved for all.

What is the role of your local government in integration?

Immigrant integration occurs at the local level with community partners sharing resources to ensure that new residents have opportunities to participate and impact growth. At the same time, the receiving community benefits from the new tools and diverse contributions newcomers make to their already established communities. Local leaders play a critical role in providing a safe environment for everyone to work together to build a cohesive community.

Local leaders must protect the rights of all residents so that everyone feels safe engaging with their leaders and each other.

Local government should enact policies that promote human dignity and build trust between constituents and their leaders. For instance, many immigrants fear interacting with others in their communities for fear of deportation or rejection by fellow residents. When newcomers feel protected, they are more willing and able to engage with the receiving community.

Local government should provide access to basic services to all residents.

Many communities across the United States have implemented programs that will allow all residents to access certain basic services. For example, many immigrants do not have a valid form of identification that they can use to register their children in school or to apply for a library card. Cities such as Cincinnati, Greensboro, New York, and Phoenix have ID programs that allow all residents access to these services. In New York, more than 600,000 people with the New York ID enjoy access to the city's museums and libraries, and they can now open bank accounts at nearly 75 local institutions (learn more at [cliniclegal.org/resources/forms-identification-undocumented-immigrants](https://www.cliniclegal.org/resources/forms-identification-undocumented-immigrants)). Find more ideas for initiatives at CLINIC's integration page at [cliniclegal.org/integration](https://www.cliniclegal.org/integration).

How can you get your local leaders involved?

1 Compliment your leaders for supporting policies that create welcoming spaces for all residents to enjoy. Share client stories with your local city government about how these policies have improved lives by creating opportunities for employment, education and personal growth.

2 If your community does not have welcoming initiatives in place, offer to partner with your local leaders to create an integration plan for your community and invite leaders of your immigrant community to contribute.

3 Organize fundraisers in the community to help pay for integration programs. When local leaders see the community taking the initiative to provide resources for such programs, they may feel more inclined to participate. Furthermore, this lets the local government know that they will not have to cover 100% of the cost associated with maintaining these programs.

4 Cultivate local leaders and law enforcement personnel willing to acknowledge the concerns of all parties involved and speak against discrimination and other activities that create fear and distrust in the community. This is a way to abate fears and build a positive connection with the constituents.

5 Ask your mayor or city council to dedicate a community-wide day to perform random acts of kindness. Invite everyone to work together on service projects throughout the community, such as plant-a-tree day or make blankets to donate to local hospitals and homeless shelters. This gives people an opportunity to interact with people who they would not ordinarily engage with.

6 Work with your city council and mayor to support an Executive Order that publically welcomes immigrants into your community and that celebrates your community's diversity.