



*The Role of
Municipal Leaders*
in Helping Immigrants
Become an Integral Part of
Colorado's Communities

The mission of The Colorado Trust is to advance the health and well-being of the people of Colorado.

Since 2000, The Colorado Trust has provided support to immigrants and refugees living in Colorado. Through The Trust's Supporting Immigrant and Refugee Families Initiative, a number of Colorado communities are supporting immigrants and "established" residents in working together for strong, healthy communities.

The Colorado Trust

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The mission of the Colorado Municipal League is to build strong cities and towns through advocacy, information and training.

The Colorado Municipal League has a commitment to providing community leaders with information about changes and trends, as well as sharing examples of how some communities are adapting to changes.

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Dear Municipal Leader:

Colorado has become a gateway for immigrants and refugees. These newcomers, who come from countries around the world, represent the widest possible range of ethnic groups, religious beliefs and education levels. They bring change to communities and, at times, pose challenges for municipal leaders. For example, multiple languages and cultural differences can make communication and interactions challenging for police, paramedics, librarians, code enforcement officers and other city departments.

Despite some challenges, immigrants and refugees share similar values as Americans and bring strength and vitality to Colorado communities. Many have:

- Strong values of caring for families and friends
- A strong work ethic, often working two or more jobs
- A strong entrepreneurial spirit, starting new businesses at a rate higher than longer-term residents.

And certainly, they add rich diversity to our culture.

Municipal leaders realize that many of these newcomers are becoming an integral part of Colorado's communities, and they recognize their important role in helping immigrants and refugees in this process. They also know that it benefits everyone – long-term residents as well as newcomers – when immigrants learn English, become self-sufficient, feel they belong, attain citizenship and become participating members in the social, cultural and civic life of the community.

We hope some of the lessons being learned in communities across our state provide you with greater awareness and new ideas on how you can proactively work to integrate immigrants into your communities.

Sincerely,



John R. Moran, Jr.
President & CEO
The Colorado Trust



Sam Mamet
Executive Director
Colorado Municipal League



How To Get Started Reaching Out To New Americans

1. Learn what immigrant groups are in your community.

Consult the census for the numbers, place of origin and housing location of immigrants in your community. Also contact your local school district. Schools are one of the first places where immigrants mingle with established residents, and school leaders have information about the numbers of students who are foreign-born, the languages they speak, their countries of origin and the percentage who qualify for free or reduced lunches.

2. Learn the challenges faced by the immigrant groups in your community.

Immigrant organizations and ethnic leaders are a good source of information about the challenges immigrants in your community are facing, as are representatives of the schools, and health and human service providers who serve immigrants.

3. Discover what services are available to assist immigrants with integration into your community.

Organize a meeting to explore what services are available to immigrants in your community, where there may be gaps or overlaps in services and who would be interested in being part of an effort to reach out to newcomers. Consider inviting representatives of the schools, library, law enforcement, courts, social services, recreational district, health providers, ESL teachers, Workforce Center personnel, the local Chamber of Commerce/business leaders, the faith community, immigrant leaders, interested citizens and others you may identify.

4. Ask immigrants what would make them feel more a part of the community.

Meet with immigrants and refugees to learn how the established community can make them feel welcomed and what kinds of information they need to

Consider adding multicultural events to existing festivals and celebrations.



help them become part of the community. Advertise the meeting by sending bilingual fliers home with school children and placing bilingual posters in shops, churches, recreation centers, health clinics, libraries and other locations where immigrants and refugees congregate. Advertise to long-term residents through your usual outreach sources (city newsletter, local newspaper or television). Hold the meeting at a place where immigrants feel welcome, such as the library, a school or a church. Provide food, babysitters and translators. Ask immigrant organizations, which are trusted by newcomers, to help you in this process.

5. Brainstorm innovative ways to reach out to immigrants.

Meet with people who are interested in encouraging the integration of immigrants and brainstorm ways you can combine the resources of many agencies, individuals and organizations to help immigrants become a true part of your community.

Some ideas include:

- Sponsor English as a Second Language classes, “talk English” sessions, adult literacy classes, citizenship classes, workshops on such topics as parenting, banking, financial management and home ownership. Offer “Living in America” classes to acquaint immigrants and refugees with American laws and customs.

6. Plan ways to increase the cultural competency within your city “family.”

How members of the city council and city staff interact with immigrants and refugees will have a strong effect on whether immigrants feel respected and welcomed to your community.

Examples of ways to increase sensitivity and cultural competency are to:

- Hold Spanish (or other language) classes for employees; provide incentives for those who become proficient.
- Give priority to hiring multilingual employees.
- Conduct “Lunch and Learn” sessions for employees; bring in speakers from the ethnic groups in your community to talk about issues and answer employees’ questions.
- Develop phrase books for first responders (“Where does it hurt?” “Stay calm.” “I’m here to help you.”).
- Provide interpreters or establish a translation phone line in municipal court at least one or two days a week; schedule court appearances on those days for people who are not proficient in English.
- Put up informational signs in several languages in city hall, libraries and other public buildings.
- Make inclusiveness a priority in appointments to boards, commissions, task forces, advisory committees and other municipal bodies.
- Establish a Human Relations Commission to study and report on immigrant issues in your community.

7. Examine city regulations to see whether they pose barriers to immigrant families.

Sometimes well-meaning policies and regulations pose a special problem to immigrant families. For example, people from many cultures are used to living in extended families. Does your housing code permit multiple generations to live together? Do you have policies in place to encourage affordable housing? Could your master plan do a better job of promoting affordable housing?

“Cities and towns are the natural place – the best place – to make inclusiveness an everyday priority. Yes, there are risks involved, including the risk of offending established interests. But the greatest risk by far lies in doing nothing.”

2005 Futures Report: Inclusive Communities for All
National League of Cities

8. Lead by example!

Your personal leadership can go a long way to set the tone for an inclusive community. Even simple actions on your part can stimulate awareness and celebrate diversity.

- Raise diversity issues during community forums, council meetings, interviews and public appearances.
- Get to know immigrant leaders personally.
- Make it a point to attend multicultural events and bring other, established residents along.

9. Use your resources and learn from others.

Visit the National League of Cities' website (www.nlc.org) for additional ideas, to download helpful resource publications and to join cities across the U.S. that are building inclusive communities. *A Resource Guide for Building Inclusive Communities* lists the many NLC publications and activities to help city officials address diversity issues. In addition, The Colorado Trust has a number of helpful publications, some available in Spanish, related to immigrant integration, including *Immigrant Integration in Colorado*. Call 303-837-1200 or visit www.coloradotruster.org.

Examples of Ways that Colorado Communities are Working to Become More Inclusive

Cultural Diversity Commission

Lakewood has established a Commission on Cultural Diversity and Human Relations. Citizen volunteers, appointed by the City Council, are joined at monthly meetings by the Mayor and key city staff. The Commission is beginning a series of dialogue sessions within the community to identify, celebrate and address Lakewood citizens' diverse backgrounds and work/life requirements.

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Develop a program to link immigrants with established residents.



Five-year Multicultural Strategic Plan

In 2002, Longmont began work on a five-year strategic plan to become a more inclusive community. Four community meetings established a vision and task forces to carry out action steps. The Education Task Force has worked with the school district to implement a program to bridge the Latino achievement gap. The Housing and Health Task Force has worked with the Salud Clinic to train Latino leaders as peer counselors and with Longmont United Hospital to educate health providers on cultural sensitivity. The Culture Task Force assists with multicultural events and has co-sponsored a series of community dialogue sessions that include panels of immigrants. The Community Involvement Task Force led a series of grassroots “Tamales and Talks” gatherings in volunteers’ homes. That was followed by “Quesadillas and Conversations” meetings hosted by city officials to discuss ways to enhance city services. Longmont also is part of the Boulder County initiative (below).

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Community Dialogues

Boulder County is conducting a series of community dialogues to build understanding and relationships between people and to generate solutions that strengthen the community. Dialogue Groups, Dialogue Days, and Action and Celebration Forums are small- and large-group, facilitated events that engage immigrants and U.S.-born members of the community in unique opportunities to discuss diverse points of view, gain understanding of other perspectives and initiate collaborative community projects.

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Classes and More

Morgan County, with a high percentage of Spanish-speaking newcomers, has established an immigrant initiative with five goals: academic outreach, community information-sharing, social training, community networking and activities. Civics classes are helping prepare those who want to

become citizens, and parenting classes in Spanish are held monthly to talk about family issues and to create leaders in immigrant groups. Inclusive neighborhood block parties are being planned with local police, and meetings are being planned with the school district to explore the establishment of a mentoring program.

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Evaluation of Internal Policies and Practices

The City Council in Brighton has established an “inclusive community” initiative to ensure that all groups within the city – people with disabilities, youth, immigrants and others – are treated fairly, are invited to events and feel welcome in Brighton as they live, work, learn and play. City staff is examining all of Brighton’s programs, projects and services to ensure both fairness and accessibility. Translating major publications into other languages is among the recommendations for change.

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Picnics and Community Awareness Training

In its commitment to a “Quality Community for a Lifetime,” Commerce City provides community awareness training to its employees. A series of focus groups made up of citizens and city staff who interact most often with the community (police, neighborhood services and code enforcement) helped create the training program. The city worked with a nonprofit organization to develop a curricula specific to Commerce City, then conducted 13 full-day seminars with about 20 employees in each session. Each summer, the city also sponsors three Neighborhood Outreach picnics, complete with food and music, where community organizations are invited to share information about their services with residents. More than 40 vendors and thousands of residents attend the free event. In addition, the city publishes its Parks and Recreation brochure, *Backyard* publication and *City Lights* magazine in English and Spanish to reach Commerce City’s diverse community.

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Focus on Cultural Competency, Leadership Development, Education and Employment

Summit County, including the towns of Dillon, Silverthorne, Frisco, Breckenridge, Heeney and Montezuma, held meetings that attracted approximately 200 people to talk about how the county can increase community attachment and become more inclusive. More than 50 recommendations were compiled to create the county's Community Integration Plan, which focuses on three main areas: cultural competency, leadership development, and education and employment. A media campaign to increase cultural competency includes "Culture Counts," which airs daily on the local resort television station, and the monthly "Heroes and Best Practices," which highlights leaders in local integration efforts in Summit County's newspaper. Also fulfilling the plan's recommendations, the Town of Frisco sponsored a speaker series throughout the school year, providing role models promoting success and diversity to middle school students. Plans for cultural competency trainings and an intercultural council, among other things, are under development.

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Adopting the NLC Inclusiveness Model

In early 2005, Lafayette funded a study of the issues faced by immigrants in the community. Months of meetings with Latino leaders and concerned community members resulted in a series of recommendations to the City Council. Subsequently, the City Council joined cities across the U.S. in passing an inclusiveness resolution developed by the National League of Cities, and by passing an ordinance that will establish a Latino Advisory Board. Similar to other boards and commissions in Lafayette, members of the board will be citizen volunteers.

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One-stop Information, Health Liaison, Immigrant Friends

Littleton spent a year planning its Immigrant Integration Initiative, holding a “Community Conversation” that attracted more than 100 immigrants and long-term residents, followed by small-group meetings that explored the kinds of services and events that would make immigrants feel welcome. Today, an all-volunteer Immigrant Council oversees the work of a One-stop Information coordinator, who answers questions and provides information from an office at Littleton’s library, and a health and wellness liaison, who provides information about health and health services to leaders in ethnic communities, who can then share that information with others. The initiative also partially funds a school/parent liaison and is establishing a Friends program to connect newcomers with established residents.

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Meet with immigrants and refugees to learn how the established community can make them feel welcome.

It's important for municipal leaders to recognize that just because people are in America, it does not mean that they fully understand or have had the opportunity yet to adapt to American life.



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