



# Supporting Immigrant Integration

AN INITIATIVE OF THE COLORADO TRUST



Photo: Breckenridge, CO

“ OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD IMMIGRATION REFLECTS OUR FAITH IN THE AMERICAN IDEAL. WE HAVE ALWAYS BELIEVED IT POSSIBLE FOR MEN AND WOMEN WHO START AT THE BOTTOM TO RISE AS FAR AS THEIR TALENT AND ENERGY ALLOW. NEITHER RACE NOR PLACE OF BIRTH SHOULD AFFECT THEIR CHANCES. ”

- ROBERT KENNEDY

## A NATION OF NATIONS

Historically, immigrants and refugees have settled in the United States seeking the American Dream – a peaceful and prosperous existence based on values of human dignity and human rights.

People leave their homeland for a variety of reasons – to seek religious tolerance, political freedom, refuge from war, economic opportunity or reunification with family. The United States, with its storied past as a nation of nations, remains a chief receiving country of such immigrants and refugees.

The Spanish colonization of the Americas began in the late 1400s. Thereafter came the English colonists of the 1600s, followed by the Dutch, French and Germans. Some of these original immigrants brought with them African slaves, a practice that continued through the early 1800s.

Large numbers of German, Polish and Russian Jews emigrated to the United States from the 1820s to the 1880s, sparking industrial growth in New York City and elsewhere. Italians and Scotch-Irish farmers also emigrated during this time.

The greatest influx of immigrants to date occurred between the 1880s and the early 1920s when Polish immigrants settled in cities such as Chicago, Cleveland and Detroit, and many Eastern Europeans settled in New York and other major cities. Also during this period, Armenian Christians emigrated to escape Moslem massacres, and Japanese and Chinese men came to America to work as field laborers, miners, railroad workers and domestic servants.

The multicultural inheritance of Mexican Americans reflects the influences of Spain, Mexico and indigenous cultures, shaped by hundreds of years of survival and adaptation. In the 1920s, Mexicans arrived as temporary agricultural workers, and Filipinos came to work the sugar cane plantations. By 1930, the migration of West Indians rose to approximately 85,000, most of whom settled in black neighborhoods on the East coast.

The current period of immigration began in 1965 when U.S. Immigration laws gave preference to close relatives of U.S. citizens and immigrants with skills needed in the United States.

## IMMIGRANTS IN COLORADO

Colorado's foreign-born population increased 160% between 1990 and 2000, and now comprises 9% of the state's increasingly diverse population. These newcomers offer a variety of skills and talents to Colorado communities, including cultural richness and a strong work ethic.

Immigrants contribute to the state's social composition and economic structure in many ways – from paying taxes to revitalizing neighborhoods and consuming products and services. Immigrants also hold key roles in the civic life of their communities.

Of Colorado's immigrant population in 2000, 55.6% were from Latin America, 19.6% from Asia, 17.6% from Europe, 3.7% from North America (including the greater Canada region), 2.6% from Africa and 0.8% from Oceania (i.e., the greater Australia and New Zealand region).

While most settle along the Front Range, smaller towns have also experienced significant increases in immigrant populations. According to Census 2000 figures, immigrant populations in Garfield, Eagle and Summit counties increased 568%, 389% and 722%, respectively, with immigrants filling job vacancies in ski resorts, hotels and other service industries. Immigrant populations in Morgan, Yuma and Lincoln counties increased 218%, 873% and 792%, respectively, with most newcomers working in the meatpacking and agriculture industries.

Yet all too often, immigrants and refugees are left to fend for themselves when it comes to adapting to a new culture and society, and integrating into civic life. Newcomers often face language barriers, as well as barriers to affordable housing, health care access, education, employment and legal services, as well as discrimination.

(Source: Migration Policy Institute)

## SUPPORTING IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION

To help newcomers adapt to life in Colorado, The Colorado Trust introduced its Supporting Immigrant and Refugee Families Initiative (SIRFI) in 2000. Through this four-year effort, The Trust supported 23 organizations that provide mental health or cultural adjustment services to immigrants and refugees.

As the initiative unfolded, The Trust recognized the need for greater commitment by both immigrants and their receiving communities to achieve successful immigrant integration – including collaboration among mainstream institutions, immigrant-serving organizations and individual community members.

Under SIRFI's new Immigrant Integration phase – a four-and-a-half-year (2004-2009), \$6.4 million endeavor – 10 Colorado communities are working toward this common goal by forming broad community coalitions, including representatives from the health care, education, business, banking, law enforcement and local government sectors, as well as libraries, faith-based organizations, immigrant-serving organizations and, of course, immigrants and refugees themselves.

Through an inclusive community planning effort and long-term implementation, the Immigrant Integration effort aims to build communities that are a productive and cohesive whole – a reflection of the cultural, religious and political diversity of all its members.

**IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION:  
ESTABLISHED AND NEWCOMER RESIDENTS WORKING TOGETHER TO ENSURE  
THAT ALL COMMUNITY MEMBERS ARE ENGAGED IN COMMUNITY LIFE.**

An independent evaluation of the initiative is being conducted by a team of evaluators led by the Association for the Study and Development of Community. The evaluation is examining how communities formed collaborations to support immigrant integration and whether outcomes identified in the community plans are achieved. In addition, a community survey will provide insight into residents' sense of immigrant integration in the 10 grantee communities.

The Immigrant Integration phase of the Supporting Immigrant and Refugee Families Initiative is managed by The Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning, Joe Wismann-Horther, SIRFI Project Director, 303-863-0188, [jwh@springinstitute.org](mailto:jwh@springinstitute.org).

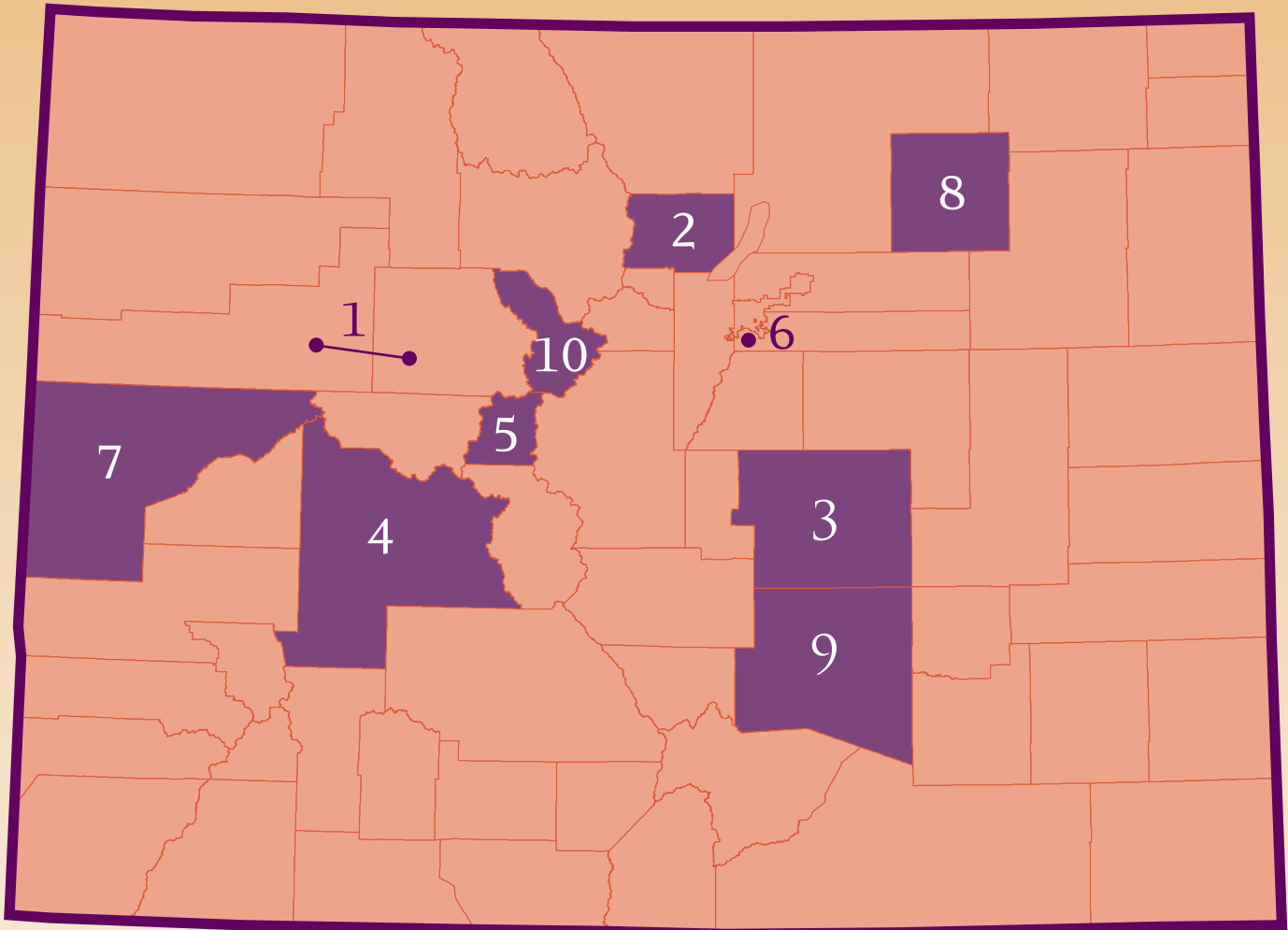
For more information about this initiative, contact Susan Downs-Karkos, Senior Program Officer, [susan@coloradotrust.org](mailto:susan@coloradotrust.org). For additional information about the associated evaluation, contact Nancy B. Csuti, Director of Evaluation, [nancy@coloradotrust.org](mailto:nancy@coloradotrust.org).

“ IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION MEANS CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNITIES AND IMMIGRANTS TO WORK TOGETHER AND TO THRIVE. IT'S OUR GOAL TO HELP COLORADO COMMUNITIES TO BECOME STRONG AND VIBRANT PLACES IN WHICH TO LIVE. ”

– JOHN R. MORAN, JR., PRESIDENT & CEO OF THE COLORADO TRUST

Under The Colorado Trust's Immigrant Integration initiative, 10 Colorado communities are developing and implementing comprehensive plans to help immigrants and refugees adjust to – and become an integral part of – their communities.

## COLORADO



### THE COLORADO TRUST'S 10 IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION COMMUNITIES

1. ASPEN TO PARACHUTE
2. BOULDER COUNTY
3. EL PASO COUNTY
4. GUNNISON COUNTY
5. LAKE COUNTY

6. CITY OF LITTLETON
7. MESA COUNTY
8. MORGAN COUNTY
9. PUEBLO COUNTY
10. SUMMIT COUNTY



## IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION

SUCCESSFUL IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION REQUIRES A MUTUAL COMMITMENT BETWEEN A RECEIVING COMMUNITY AND ITS INDIVIDUAL IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES.

FOR IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES, integration is a highly individualized process of becoming part of a new community and feeling connected to a new country. To thrive as members of a receiving community, immigrants...

- *Commit to building a life here, rather than viewing their circumstances as temporary*
- *Contribute as soon and fully as possible to their community by assuming leadership roles and participating in civic life*
- *Adapt to a new lifestyle without losing their own identity or rejecting their past.*

FOR RECEIVING COMMUNITIES, the process of integration is mutual, dynamic and ongoing. Established residents and institutions of receiving communities ...

- *Adapt to new residents as they adapt to their new environment*
- *Create opportunities that empower immigrants by providing a sense of belonging, participation and success*
- *Build relationships among all community members to strengthen a sense of responsibility for each other.*

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The grantee communities of The Colorado Trust's Immigrant Integration effort have formed inclusive alliances among immigrants and their receiving communities. Here is what some members of these coalitions have to say about integrating immigrants and refugees into their communities:

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*“Increasing numbers of immigrants and refugees are coming to our community, and they are coming from increasingly diverse countries, backgrounds, ethnic groups and religions. Communities that don't reach out to newcomers risk having separate and divisive ‘we-they’ neighborhoods. It's essential to provide the tools that will help immigrants put down roots and become true members of our community.”*

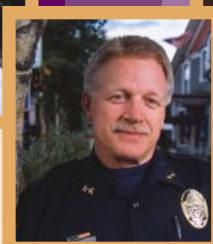
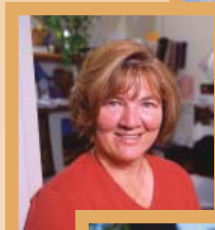
**Susan Thornton**, former Mayor of Littleton

*“This effort offers a diverse group of agencies, individuals and immigrants the opportunity to come together, network and solve problems. Immigrant integration is important to us because we value a healthy and welcoming community, which means providing good housing, an education and health care access for all our residents.”*

**Carol Dawson, RN**, Director, Gunnison County Public Health Department

*“Learning English is critical for new immigrants to integrate and succeed. It is equally important for immigrants to learn the unwritten cultural rules of their new country.”*

**Rossana Miranda Johnston**, Mexican immigrant, President and Founder, Miranda-Johnston Cross-Cultural, Boulder



*“A new immigrant is deprived of the natural network of family, friends and schoolmates one has in one's home environment. Littleton's Immigrant Integration Initiative attempts to provide that essential network for successful integration – as a volunteer, I help new immigrants get familiar with their new environment. I see this network benefiting my children in shaping their future.”*

**Tsegaye Hailu**, Ethiopian immigrant, Protection Specialist, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

*“It's not easy to learn English and how to operate a restaurant – my receiving community is helping me understand the rules about banks and paying taxes, and how much I can save. In return, it is my obligation to provide for my family and to be a responsible business owner in my community.”*

**Rafael Vázquez**, Mexican immigrant, Owner, La Cascada Dos Mexican Restaurant, Fort Morgan

*“Immigrant integration means being neighborly, making people feel welcome, respected, needed and safe. When you help someone else be successful, treat them kindly, or simply listen, you are modeling the behavior that helps build a community of people who care for each other and learn from each other.”*

**Julie Hinkson**, Director, Community Funding & Agency Relations, United Way of Mesa County

*“People from different cultures often have reservations about working openly with the police department. So we're building bridges alongside a Latino advisory council to show immigrants that we're here to help them. The police force should also reflect the demographics of our community, which is something I'm always working on.”*

**Rick Holman**, Chief of Police, Town of Breckenridge