

Cities as Hubs for Innovations in Immigrant Integration: Models from Philadelphia

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Introduction

The U.S. is in the throes of a period of intense discord over immigration policy. Yet, even as the federal government implements restrictive regulations and takes a hostile stance in regards to immigration, municipal governments and nonprofits in communities across the country continue to develop innovative and successful approaches to immigrant integration. For years, the lack of comprehensive immigration reform at the federal level and inadequate policies toward immigrants by most state governments, have left city governments, nonprofits, and community groups to take the lead in supporting immigrant and refugee communities. Recent hardline anti-immigrant rhetoric, policy proposals, and actions by the Trump administration, including the recent announcement to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, have escalated tensions between federal, state, and local governments regarding immigrant

policies. These tensions have made it clear that we must look to the local level for leadership in protecting immigrants' rights.

America's cities have long been gateways for immigrant arrivals and many cities have developed innovative programs and rich networks of nonprofits and community groups to support immigrant and refugee communities. Many municipal governments recognize the numerous benefits that immigrants bring to their cities, including cultural diversity, population growth, and economic development. Yet, they also struggle to address the challenges associated with integrating diverse, low-income, and limited English proficient (LEP) populations.

This edition of the *Social Innovations Journal* examines successful models for delivering integration services to immigrant and refugee communities, supporting immigrant leadership development, and promoting pro-immigrant policies at the municipal level. Rather than take a sample of successful programs and policies from across the nation, we use a place-based approach that provides an in-depth examination of developments in one major U.S. city -- Philadelphia. The City of Brotherly and Sisterly Love has a longstanding tradition of serving as an immigrant gateway, and it has also experienced a recent upsurge in its immigrant population, which has inspired the creation of new groups and collaborations.

Philadelphia's experiences with immigrant integration hold useful lessons for both large cities and smaller municipalities across the country.

The current tension over immigration policy will likely intensify in the months to come with protracted legal battles and continued confusion and fear among immigrant and refugee communities. In the face of hostile rhetoric and policies at the federal level, urban populations have taken strong stances in favor of supporting welcoming policies for immigrants and protecting their fundamental rights. Therefore, America's cities will likely remain focal points on how to establish effective immigration policies now and in the foreseeable future. With the *Social Innovation Journal's* expansion to other regions of the country, we hope that this collection of articles will not just inform leaders in other cities, but will inspire them to share their own contributions so that together we can continue to explore and promote the role of cities as change agents in immigration.

Philadelphia's Growing Immigrant Population: A Snapshot

Like many cities across America, the City of Philadelphia has experienced rapid recent growth in its immigrant population. Philadelphia's foreign-born population of immigrants and refugees has almost doubled over the past 25 years, increasing from

104,816 in 1990 to 197,563 in 2015. Philadelphia has long been a refugee resettlement site, and until Trump's executive order halving the national ceiling for refugee arrivals, the city was receiving approximately 750 refugees per year. Foreign-born residents now constitute 12.7 percent of Philadelphia's total population, up from 6.7 percent in 1990. Immigrant Philadelphians come from diverse backgrounds: 41 percent were born in Asia, 32 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean, 18 percent in Europe, and 9 percent in Africa.

Immigrants have made significant contributions to the city's cultural, civic, and economic life. Immigrants have helped reverse decades of population decline and have boosted the economy -- expanding the workforce in key sectors, starting thousands of businesses in the Philadelphia metro area, and paying billions in taxes annually. Immigrants have revitalized declining commercial corridors and brought new vibrancy and dynamism into the city's business and cultural life.

While the immigrant population performs well on certain measures of socioeconomic success (for example, 28 percent of the foreign-born in Philadelphia have a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 25 percent of the native-born), immigrants generally confront greater challenges than native-born Americans in several indicators of socioeconomic wellbeing (Table 1).

Table 1: Socioeconomic Indicators, Foreign-Born vs. Native-Born, Philadelphia, 2015

	Foreign-Born	Native-Born
Less than High School Education (population 25 years and older)	29%	18%
Annual Income below \$25,000 (full-time, year-round workers, population 16 years and older)	34%	18%
Below 200% of the Poverty Level	52%	48%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-15 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates

Aggregate data obscures stark racial and ethnic disparities and the vulnerabilities of specific immigrant populations, such as the undocumented, refugees, elderly, the limited English proficient, and those that fall within multiple of these categories. For example, 41 percent of Latinos and 27 percent of Asian families live below the federal poverty level in Philadelphia compared to 15 percent of White families.

Approximately 10 percent of Philadelphians speak English “less than very well,” which national data shows makes them almost twice as likely to live in poverty than English proficient individuals. Philadelphia also has a rapidly growing undocumented population,

currently estimated at 50,000 and constituting approximately 25 percent of the foreign-born population.

Nonprofit Service and Advocacy Landscape

Over the past two decades, Philadelphia has seen a significant increase in the number of nonprofit organizations and community groups providing services to and/or advocating on behalf of immigrants and refugees in Philadelphia. Over this time, many of the older and more established organizations have grown and expanded their range of services and new immigrant-led grassroots groups have emerged. Philadelphia now has a rich network of nonprofit and community organizations that serve the city's diverse immigrant and refugee communities. Organizations active in this field include faith- and community-based service providers, grassroots social justice organizations, economic development organizations, advocacy groups, and organizations that fall under multiple categories. Services provided include: legal assistance, refugee resettlement, health care, social services, English Language Learner (ELL) classes, interpretation and translation, citizenship and civic engagement, community organizing, workforce development, and cultural programming. Despite the growth in the number of nonprofit organizations

serving immigrant and refugee communities, major challenges remain. There continues to be a greater demand than availability of services in many areas, as well as significant service gaps. Many small nonprofits, particularly grassroots social justice organizations, struggle to maintain essential programming on tiny budgets.

Role of Municipal Government

Recognizing the growth of the immigrant population and the positive impact of immigrants on the city's population and economy, Philadelphia city government has established a growing record of policy-making to support the needs of immigrant and refugee communities. Over the past 15 years, executive orders, city council resolutions, and a Philadelphia home rule charter amendment have introduced changes to benefit immigrants, including mandating language access services across city agencies, requiring non-inquiry of immigration status for city services, establishing a Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (OIA), limiting immigration detainers, and cracking down on immigration services fraud. Other initiatives have celebrated the city's diverse cultures and promoted citizenship among Legal Permanent Residents (LPRs). The City continues to work on implementation of language access and other immigrant-friendly policies across city departments.

Institutionalization of best practices continues to be a challenging aspect of the City's work.

Mayor Jim Kenney has been a long-standing advocate and outspoken supporter of immigrant-friendly policies and has committed to strengthening the city's efforts to support immigrant communities to attract newcomers. At the outset of his administration, his transition team developed a plan and set of priorities for OIA to focus on, including ensuring that city agencies meet language access requirements, the development of a year-round calendar of activities to celebrate Philadelphia's diversity of cultures, promoting immigrant-owned small businesses and commercial corridors, facilitating immigrant inclusion by providing Municipal Identification Documents, and partnering with nonprofit organizations to assist eligible LPRs in becoming citizens.

Summary of Articles

The *Social Innovations Journal* Immigrant Edition consists of 16 curated articles that provide coverage of key local innovations in the field of immigration and refugee services and organizing in Philadelphia. The contributors are leaders representing a range of outstanding organizations in the field. In addition, an invited article by Nisha Agarwal, Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs in New York, provides an overview of the coordinating role municipal

offices of immigrant affairs can play in building collaborations across sectors, leveraging resources for large-scale initiatives, ensuring access to city services, and promoting pro-immigrant public policies. Together, this collection of articles covers some of the most critical aspects of the current debate on immigration that is being played out at the city level, including the need for services for diverse immigrant and refugee populations, creating an inclusive community, the role of public and private sectors, and needs and innovations within specific issue areas, such as economic and workforce development, health and wellbeing, education, civic engagement, and social justice.

Collaboration

One key theme that cuts across many of the contributions is that collaboration has been a successful strategy used by nonprofits and local government to address complex issues within the immigrant and refugee community. Collaboration, particularly across sectors, enables participating organizations to use multi-prong approaches to address complex social challenges. Collaborative projects provide an opportunity for organizations to build relationships, increase efficiency, scale up, and maximize impact -- and therefore, have proven attractive to local and national funders. Two articles

place particular emphasis on this theme:

- In ***PA is Ready!: Pennsylvania Funders and Nonprofits Collaborate in New Way to Build Immigrant Legal Assistance, Leadership and Organizing Capacity***, Sundrop Carter and Ana Lisa Yoder describe the development and structure of the PA is Ready! collective impact project, a unique, flexible model that has brought funders, legal service providers, and grassroots organizations in Pennsylvania together to build immigrant legal assistance, leadership and organizing capacity. The model includes a number of innovations, most notably placing primary responsibility for decision-making regarding allocation of resources in the hands of community partners rather than funders, thereby challenging traditional power dynamics.
- Naomi Burrows & Juliane Ramic's article, ***Defining the Community Integration Model of Refugee Resettlement***, explains how the Nationalities Service Center (NSC) has cultivated creative partnerships with a range of local organizations to develop refugee health clinics, community gardens, legal clinics, and other core components of its successful refugee resettlement program. The partnerships have enabled NSC to dramatically increase the number of refugees the organization resettles, expand its networks of

support for refugees and engage local communities in learning about and supporting refugees.

Role of Municipal Government

Just as collaboration among nonprofit organizations has been a key to success, so too has collaboration between nonprofits and city government. Two articles in particular illustrate the central role of municipal government in addressing immigrant communities' needs:

- At a time when local policy is so important, Miriam Enriquez and Vanessa Stine's article, **City Legislation to Combat Immigration Services Fraud**, describes the innovative collaboration between the City of Philadelphia and Friends of Farmworkers to develop, pass, and implement local legislation to protect consumers from immigration services fraud.
- Nisha Agarwal's guest article, **New York City's Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs – An Innovative Partner for Immigrants at the Local Level and Beyond**, shows how the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) is setting a national standard for how city government can leverage their role to build expansive and innovative initiatives to support immigrant populations. Through effective partnerships with the nonprofit,

private, and philanthropic sectors, MOIA's network of programs include: IDNYC, New York City's landmark municipal identification card program; ActionNYC, a program to provide free and confidential legal screenings and immigration services to low-income immigrants; and Cities for Action, a national collaboration among Mayors to advocate for federal immigration reform and other policies that protect immigrant residents. MOIA partners effectively with organizations New Yorkers already know and trust to ensure programming is easily accessible and community-based.

Health and Wellbeing

Turning to specific issue areas, it is not surprising given Philadelphia's robust network of academic hospitals and other medical providers, that the city has a well-developed network of programs to support the health and wellbeing of immigrant and refugee communities. Nonprofits and community-based organizations have developed effective short- and long-term partnerships with medical providers to address the needs of vulnerable immigrant populations including undocumented immigrants and unaccompanied minors, refugees, and victims of domestic violence. The following articles describe remarkable work in this area:

- In ***Puentes de Salud: A Clinic that Bridges, Curates, and Empowers***, Bhakthi Sahgal describes how a small volunteer health clinic started by physicians has grown to serve 6,500 patients per year and play a significant role in improving health outcomes for low-income, uninsured Latino communities in Philadelphia. Puentes harnesses the collective power of volunteers, including medical residents and students, nurse practitioners, “promotoras”, physicians, and others. Over time, to better address the complex social determinants of health, Puentes has broadened its programming to include after-school and cultural enrichment programs, ESL and GED classes, yoga, parenting, and health workshops, and Know Your Rights sessions.
- Amy Jones, Christa Loffelman, and Oni Richards-Waritay’s ***Utilizing Community Strengths and Innovation to Implement Community-Based Models of Care*** describes SEAMAAC and African Family Health Organization’s shared culturally-informed and community-based approach to delivering health and social services to marginalized African and Asian immigrant and refugee communities in Philadelphia. Their organizational model is based on effective partnerships with, and mobilization of trusted community leaders.

- Access to culturally competent and linguistically appropriate behavioral health services has been a long-standing shortcoming in health care for immigrants and refugees in Philadelphia. In ***La Puerta Abierta: An "Open Door" Approach to Supporting Immigrant Youth and Families' Emotional Well-being***, Cathi Tillman explains the rationale and impact of La Puerta Abierta's holistic model, which is built around a caring community of therapists, peer support networks, and partner organizations to support youth and families who have experienced profound trauma. At the heart of the model is the belief that affected youth bring natural resilience and strengths to the healing process and can be empowered to support others from their communities.
- In ***Maternity Care Coalition: Meeting the Needs of Changing Communities***, Sara Jann describes how a mainstream service provider has maintained its commitment to serving the region's most vulnerable communities, successfully adapting to address the needs of pregnant immigrant women and their families by hiring bilingual/bicultural staff from their respective communities, partnering with community-based organizations, and building strong advocate-family relationships.

Economic Development

As noted above, immigrants have made major contributions to Philadelphia's economic revitalization, and two articles in particular illustrate the role that local nonprofits have played in promoting economic development in immigrant communities:

- In the article **Passport to Progress: Recreating Career Pathways for Immigrant Professionals**, Nicole Pumphrey and Jennifer Ginsberg explain how the Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians developed its successful International Professionals Program (IPP), which integrates highly skilled immigrant professionals into the American workforce. The Welcoming Center recognizes that a large pool of highly skilled immigrants in Pennsylvania are unable to make the most of their education and experience due to difficulties integrating into the American workforce. Relying on a combination of technical training, job readiness workshops, peer-to-peer support and relationship building, and corporate engagement opportunities focused on particular industries, the IPP has proven highly effective at helping immigrants re-launch careers and realize their full potential.
- In **Undocumented Immigrants are Worthy Candidates for Capital Investments**, Will Gonzalez and Luis Mora focus on how Ceiba (a coalition of community based organizations

focused on asset building services) and FINANTA (a Community Development Financial Institution) have collaborated to provide financial services to undocumented immigrant families who are underserved by mainstream financial institutions. While Ceiba focuses primarily on financial counseling and free income tax filing services, and FINANTA on micro lending and enhanced lending circles, the two organizations collaborate by referring clients to one another and assuring that their services are integrated in a way that maximizes asset building opportunities for their programs' participants.

Education

Until recently, outside of the youth organizing work of groups such as Asian Americans United and JUNTOS, there have been relatively few immigrant-focused education projects. However, this is changing as local nonprofits work to address the educational needs of immigrant students and ease their fears in the current hostile, divisive climate:

- In **Public School/Community Collaborations that Foster Immigrant and Refugee Inclusion**, Judith Bernstein-Baker, Valeri Harteg, Maria Sotomayor-Giacomucci, and Elizabeth Yaeger, describe three promising school-based approaches to creating a welcoming and safe

environment for immigrant students and their parents. These include: partnering with schools to provide Know Your Rights sessions and distribute “Welcoming Schools” Toolkits to families, educators and administrators; providing on-site “Immigration 101” legal education for School District staff; and developing after-school ELL programs tailored to the needs of newly arrived refugees and immigrants.

Social Justice & Civic Engagement

Local organizations have also had great success in developing innovative approaches to enhance civic engagement and organizing for social justice in Philadelphia’s immigrant communities, as demonstrated particularly in two articles:

- **In Faith in Action: Immigrants, Refugees and Allies Pursue a Holistic Vision for Community-Initiated Education, Organizing & Accompaniment**, Bethany Welch, Atianah Thomas, and Andrea Rusli, describe the Aquinas Center’s unique, multi-cultural, approach to education and organizing among South Philadelphia’s immigrant communities. Firmly grounded in a culture of mutuality -- in which engagements must be “bi-directional” by supporting and empowering the community -- the Aquinas Center provides an impressive array of

educational and service activities alongside advocacy and organizing projects, such as a new Community ID program.

- Ray Murphy's **Increasing Civic Engagement Among Immigrant Communities to Create A Powerful New Voting Bloc**, describes a new collaborative effort to engage Asian American/Pacific Islander (AAPI) voters in Philadelphia by mobilizing trusted messengers from community-based organizations serving the AAPI community. Through conversations about issues and legislation that impact AAPI communities and civics lessons, and with technical assistance, data and technology tools and coordination support from Pennsylvania Voice, five organizations are making an impact by registering and turning out tens of thousands of AAPI voters.

Leadership Profiles

Finally, the Immigrant Edition concludes with profiles of three long-standing and prominent Philadelphia immigration rights leaders and advocates:

- Michael Matza profiles **Blanca Pacheco**, Assistant Director of the New Sanctuary Movement, whose connection with her own migration story helps her to lead local communities as a passionate and empathetic organizer for the rights of

Philadelphia's undocumented communities.

- Judith Bernstein Baker profiles long-time education organizer and now City Councilwoman, **Helen Gym**, a fiercely outspoken advocate for the rights of immigrant communities and a model example of the type of proactive local political leader the immigrant rights movement needs now.
- Meredith Chang profiles HIAS Pennsylvania's former Executive Director, **Judith Bernstein-Baker**, who through her energy, commitment, and collaboration with multiple partners, has built an outstanding legacy of programs that improve the lives of the region's most vulnerable immigrants, while also training the next generation of leaders in this field.

Viewed as a whole, this rich collection of articles highlights a number of central themes including how nonprofits and community groups have sustained critical services in a disruptive policy and funding environment and how they are integrating partnership and collaborative work to address immigrant communities' most pressing current needs. These are lessons that are sure to apply far beyond the City of Brotherly and Sisterly Love, and our hope is that these shared stories will help to cultivate new ideas and inspire initiatives to support immigrants in communities across America.

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