

# NAE Cities Index

## Best Practices Guide

The **NAE Cities Index** examines how 100 of the largest cities in the U.S. are integrating their immigrant residents while also measuring social and economic outcomes of this population. Curious how cities are using local policies and programs to best support their foreign-born community and help them thrive? Here are best practices from across the country.

### POLICY OUTCOMES

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#### Government Leadership

Creating an office of immigrant affairs or new Americans is the best way to institutionalize immigrant integration work in local government. These offices help all city services and opportunities are accessible to all residents (see examples from [Atlanta, GA](#) and [Aurora, CO](#)). Cities can also:

- Host civic engagement and leadership academies to help immigrants learn about how local government works and what services are available, and to increase their involvement in government boards and commissions.
  - Nashville's [MyCity Academy](#) and [MyCity ATL](#)
- Develop public materials to inform immigrants and refugees about their rights and the most effective methods for connecting with local services like education and healthcare providers.
  - NYC's [Directory of Services for Immigrants](#)
- Reach out to immigrant and refugee communities through regular town halls or “meet and greets” to get feedback on ways to improve their integration into the community at large.
  - Chicago's [Welcome Stations](#)
- Create a mayoral task force or advisory council to improve communication between local government and the immigrant and refugee community.
  - Denver's [Immigration and Refugee Commission](#)

## Economic Empowerment

To ensure that all residents can meet their economic potential and contribute to a prosperous and thriving local economy, newcomers must have the skills, resources, and education needed to succeed. Employers must also be able to tap into the unique talents of the local immigrant workforce.

- Approach local economic development agencies and chambers of commerce about developing or prioritizing strategies to attract and retain immigrant workers.
  - Greater Louisville [International Professionals](#) in partnership with Louisville's [Office for Globalization](#)
- Connect employers with potential employees from the immigrant community.
  - [Global Detroit's Cultural Ambassadors](#) and Welcome Center for New Pennsylvanians' [resources for employers](#) in partnership with the City of Philadelphia

## Inclusivity

Communities should ensure that all residents have access to city services by reducing barriers that may prevent immigrants from having effective interactions with local government.

- Implement language access policies across city agencies and services to ensure that all residents can access local government, public schools, healthcare, and other services in multiple languages.
  - San Jose's [Language Access Plan](#) and Philadelphia's [Language Access Plans](#)
- Require cultural competency training in city agencies so that public-facing government workers have the skills and training to serve all city constituents and all residents feel comfortable interacting with city agencies.
  - Burlington's [We Belong](#) program

## Community

Cities should take an active role in reaching out to and supporting immigrant organizations and encouraging immigrants' participation in the community at large.

- Work with local civic organizations to identify ways immigrants can participate more fully in public service and civic life, such as through local community organizations, school organizations, volunteer boards, and neighborhood associations.
  - Nashville's [Parent Ambassadors Program](#) and Dayton's [Welcome Dayton Ambassador Program](#)
- Bring immigrants and refugees together with the receiving community through cultural events, dialogues, and celebrations.
  - [The San Francisco Immigrant Integration Project](#) and Denver's [Immigrant Integration Mini-Grants](#)

## Legal Support

Building trust between the immigrant community and local government is essential to public safety and cooperation with law enforcement. Cities can also provide connections to legal services to ensure that immigrant residents have access to education and representation about their case.

- Create a network of services to help low-income immigrants access legal representation.
  - [Houston Immigration Legal Service Collaborative](#)
- Set up a legal defense fund for immigrants facing deportation.
  - [Los Angeles Justice Fund](#) and [New York Immigrant Family Unity Project \(NYIFUP\)](#)
- Partner with trusted community leaders, law enforcement, and legal service providers to educate the public on the dangers of fraud and the unauthorized practice of immigration law (UPII).
  - Baltimore’s [“Be Careful. Prepare. Seek the Right Help”](#) campaign

## SOCIOECONOMIC OUTCOMES

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### Job Opportunities

Cities can help immigrants—who often come to the U.S. with skills, credentials, and education from their home countries—find jobs in their professional field, while also supporting immigrant entrepreneurship and small business ownership.

- Provide career planning services and professional connections to help immigrants with foreign degrees find jobs, build resumes, and prepare for interviews.
  - St. Louis Mosaic Project’s [Professional Connector Program](#)
- Partner with local small business services and chambers of commerce to provide information about planning, launching, or growing a business through workshops, roundtables, and other events.
  - NYC Department of Small Business Services’ [Immigrant Business Initiative](#)
- Advertise existing programs that support new entrepreneurs, such as micro-lending programs, mentorship initiatives, and business incubation programs.
  - Welcoming Center for New Pennsylvanians’ [business support programs](#) in partnership with the City of Philadelphia

### Economic Prosperity

Through financial empowerment programs and resources, cities can help their immigrant residents open a bank account, better manage their money, and save up for college, a home, or a small business.

- Partner with local financial institutions to increase financial literacy, capability, and inclusion, and support asset development.
  - Nashville’s [Financial Empowerment Centers](#)

## Livability

Reduce barriers to homeownership and foster a welcoming school environment to encourage new residents to settle in their new community for the long term.

- Work with local developers to create affordable housing for immigrants and increase awareness of housing counseling programs.
  - Akron's [Mustard Seed Development](#)
- Provide guidance to principals, teachers, social workers, counselors, and other school personnel on the unique strengths and needs of immigrant and refugee youth, with a particular focus on English as a Second Language.
  - Louisville's [Newcomer Academy](#) and Anchorage's [Newcomer Center](#)
- Connect international students in higher education to local employers and train students and employers on immigration regulations.
  - [St. Louis Global Talent Hiring](#)

## Civic Participation

Immigrants who naturalize earn higher incomes and can vote in elections, amother other benefits. Cities can increase access to naturalization by sharing information about existing services and providing free application assistance and legal counseling. For more best practices on increasing naturalization rates in your city, check out [Cities for Citizenship \(C4C\)](#).

- Provide free legal services and financial counseling to aspiring citizens in public libraries.
  - [NYCitizenship](#)
- Coordinate with local USCIS officials to increase public awareness of the citizenship and the naturalization process.
  - Seattle's [New Citizen Campaign](#)
- Create community partnerships, such as with local service providers, libraries, and civic organizations, to offer citizenship preparation services (e.g. citizenship classes, workshops, and assistance completing applications).
  - Los Angeles's [Citizenship Corners](#)

Interested in more in-depth economic research on immigrants in your community, help developing local immigrant integration policies and programs, or matching grants?

**Apply for Round III of the [Gateways for Growth Challenge](#),  
run by NAE and Welcoming America.**

For questions or comments, contact us at:

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