

# New Americans Vote!

Advancing Social Change and  
Strengthening U.S. Democracy

## An Action Brief for Funders



Funders' Committee *for*  
Civic Participation

*gcir*  
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Grantmakers Concerned with  
Immigrants and Refugees

**The Funders' Committee for Civic Participation (FCCP)** is a Council on Foundations recognized affinity group. Through regular conference calls and regional briefings and workshops, FCCP gives grantmakers an opportunity to stay informed, to learn from the experiences of colleague funders, and to obtain a relatively comprehensive view of civic engagement activity in the United States. FCCP also seeks to engender collaborative research projects, grantmaking programs and other initiatives in areas that are deemed priorities by a number of member funders.

In 2005, the FCCP and the Proteus Fund undertook a collaborative funder process aimed at evaluating and reflecting upon the unprecedented level of §501(c)(3) voter engagement work that took place in the 2004 election cycle. The research commissioned and the deliberations among field leaders and funders are summarized in the *Voter Engagement Evaluation Project (VEEP) Report* published in January 2006, and they are provided to inform effective nonpartisan voter engagement grantmaking moving forward.

This Action Brief represents an outgrowth of the above project. It embodies two objectives that emerged from the VEEP process—to deepen our understanding of effective Integrated Voter Engagement models among distinct constituencies and to reach out to funders of those constituency groups to partner in advancing this approach. We hope that you find this Action Brief useful and that it can serve as a resource for advancing collaboration among like-minded funders across issue areas.

For information on joining the FCCP, please call: (413) 256-0349. You can find the VEEP report at [www.proteusfund.org](http://www.proteusfund.org) on the publications page and on the FCCP website (under construction).

### **Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees (GCIR)**

seeks to move the philanthropic field to advance the contributions and address the needs of the world's growing and increasingly diverse immigrant and refugee populations. With a core focus on the United States, GCIR provides grantmakers with opportunities for learning, networking, and collaboration, as well as information resources that:

- Enhance philanthropy's awareness of issues affecting immigrants and refugees;
- Deepen the field's understanding of how these issues are integral to community building in today's dynamic social, economic, and political environment; and
- Increase philanthropic support for both broad and immigrant/refugee-focused strategies that benefit newcomer populations and strengthen the larger society.

Given immigrants' growing numbers and their expanding role in the economic, social, and cultural life of nations around the globe, GCIR has become an invaluable resource to many foundations, whether they have immigrant-specific funding initiatives or wish to incorporate the immigrant and refugee dimension into their core grantmaking programs. GCIR provides members the opportunity to connect with diverse colleagues, build new skills, increase knowledge, and become part of a dynamic movement to fully integrate immigrants into U.S. society through:

- A one-stop center for high-quality Web-based and printed resources, including in-depth issue reports that help funders quickly grasp the substance of specific topic areas and learn about proven grantmaking strategies.
- Substantive opportunities to learn about emerging trends and share experiences and strategies through member-driven national and regional programs, learning circles, and national convenings.
- Technical assistance and consultation to members wishing to incorporate immigrant and refugee issues into their portfolios or seeking to expand or redirect their immigrant-related grantmaking.

In 2005, more than 1,500 grantmakers took advantage of our information resources and another 1,000 participated in our programs. For more information, visit [www.gcir.org](http://www.gcir.org) or contact the GCIR office at [info@gcir.org](mailto:info@gcir.org) or 707.824.4374.

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*New Americans Vote! Advancing Social Change and Strengthening U.S. Democracy* builds on two important recent projects by our affinity groups: *The Voter Engagement Evaluation Project (VEEP) Report*, conceived and executed by the Funders' Committee for Civic Participation (FCCP) and the Proteus Fund, and *Pursuing Democracy's Promise: Newcomer Civic Participation in America*, jointly published by Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees (GCIR) and the Funders' Committee.

The *VEEP Report* documents best practices to reach out to communities that are excluded from the most basic act that democracy enables—the act of voting. *Pursuing Democracy's Promise* highlights a range of strategies for engaging immigrants and refugees in the civic and political life of their communities.

With the goal to inform a broad audience about the importance of immigrant voter participation, the Funders' Committee invited GCIR to work as a close partner in developing *New Americans Vote!* This collaboration allowed our two organizations to deepen our own understanding of the challenges and opportunities in promoting immigrant voter engagement.

We hope that *New Americans Vote!* will inspire foundations to support nonpartisan civic and voter engagement activities. Supporting immigrant organizations that integrate voter engagement in their ongoing work not only enfranchises new American voters, but it also strengthens efforts to address issues of concern to low-income communities, like employment, housing, and health. Our support for these efforts will ensure that newcomers are fully engaged in the political, social and economic life of the United States. We believe supporting nonpartisan integrated voter engagement strategies can help your foundation meet its goals by building immigrant leadership, addressing critical social issues facing our country, and strengthening our democracy in the process.

In preparing this report, we are grateful to have benefited from the knowledge and experience of national and local funders that have supported immigrant civic participation and the nonprofit organizations that have engaged in this work prior to, during, and following the 2004 election cycle. The Funders' Committee and GCIR wish to thank field leaders, funders, and other valued colleagues who shared their perspectives and expertise, as well as those who provided feedback and helpful insights to help us finalize this report.

Henry Allen, Hyams Foundation

Seth Borgos, Center for Community Change

Elizabeth Casselman, The Clowes Fund

Anne Farris, Consultant

Emily Goldfarb, Consultant

Marissa Graciosa, Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

Joshua Hoyt, Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

Channapha Khamvongsa, American Dream Fund/  
Public Interest Project

Laura Lanzerotti, Consultant, Mobilize the  
Immigrant Vote

David Lubell, Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee  
Rights Coalition

Geri Mannion, Carnegie Corporation of New York

Craig McGarvey, Consultant

Margie McHugh, New York Immigration Coalition

Christine Neumann-Ortiz, Voces de la Frontera

Monica Regan, Partnership for Immigrant Leadership  
and Action and Mobilize the Immigrant Vote

Javier Valdes, New York Immigrant Coalition

Lee Nelson Weber, Dyer-Ives Foundation

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Finally, as we prepared to go to press with *New Americans Vote!* in spring 2006, we witnessed, and were inspired by, the incredible power of immigrant civic participation. Millions of immigrants in Chicago, Atlanta, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Omaha, New York, Dallas, Miami, Seattle, and numerous other new immigrant-receiving cities around the nation raised their voices and civic clout to demonstrate that they want to participate fully in American society. After all, full participation in American society is what civic engagement is all about.

## Donna Edwards

Executive Director, Arca Foundation

Co-Chair, Funders' Committee for Civic Participation

## Geri Mannion

Chair, Strengthening U.S. Democracy Program, Carnegie  
Corporation of New York

Co-Chair, Funders' Committee for Civic Participation

## Susan Downs-Karkos

Senior Program Officer, The Colorado Trust

Co-Chair, Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants  
and Refugees

## Taryn Higashi

Deputy Director, Human Rights Unit

Co-Chair, Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants  
and Refugees

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**“Immigrants come along, they create their institutions of faith, they engage in their kids’ education, they focus on their economic advancement, they create care and feeding service institutions. Then there comes a point where you cannot resolve the problems of your community without getting serious about civic engagement. It has become clearer with the ferocity of the anti-immigrant backlash that you are going to have to do that or your communities are going to be badly hurt. In the face of that, we have to ask what are our moral and ethical responsibilities to build civic infrastructure that supports that engagement in a sustained way.”**

Joshua Hoyt,  
Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and  
Refugee Rights (ICIRR),  
Chicago, IL

**T**he foreign-born population in the United States has nearly tripled over the last four decades. Today, one in nine of us is an immigrant; by 2010, this figure is projected to increase to nearly one in seven. Responding to the dramatic growth of the foreign-born population, immigrant organizations are implementing a wide range of strategies to engage newcomers in our community life. In so doing, many have come to recognize that integrating nonpartisan voter engagement in their ongoing advocacy, organizing, and civic participation work can enhance their ability to achieve policy goals and to strengthen the role that immigrant communities play in invigorating our nation’s democracy.

This action brief builds on the findings of the Voter Engagement Evaluation Project (VEEP), a joint project of the Proteus Fund and the Funders’ Committee for Civic Participation (FCCP), which examined nonpartisan support for voter engagement in the 2004 election. It is organized into four sections, for easy access by both funders who are new to this work and those seeking to deepen their knowledge and understanding of this field.

**Section I** introduces the concept of integrated voter engagement and why it represents a good investment opportunity for grantmakers, both those already committed to voter engagement and those wishing to leverage or expand their current investments in immigrant civic participation, organizing, and advocacy.

**Section II** elaborates on the lessons learned and the best practices in immigrant electoral engagement among immigrant organizations. It helps funders identify programmatic characteristics and components to look for in effective programs, from strong relationships built on trust to effective use of technology and the role of the ethnic media in outreach and communications.

**Section III** highlights the work of five immigrant organizations working to engage newcomers in civic and political life. These case studies illuminate effective strategies and offer different models and pathways for effective civic and political participation in immigrant and refugee communities. All recognize electoral work as a community-building endeavor, in which everyone, whether or not they are eligible to vote, can participate. And all point out that effective electoral work cannot be limited to election cycles but must be an integral and ongoing component of the organization’s work to achieve consistent results.

**Section IV** offers funders a set of concrete grantmaking recommendations to expand immigrant civic engagement, encourage and empower groups rooted in immigrant communities to undertake voter engagement work, and leverage the impact of their grant dollars through funding coordination and economies of scale.

We hope this action brief will be a valuable resource to funders, both those already supporting this work and those who are considering entering the field. Funders working in related disciplines can incorporate civic participation and voter engagement strategies to leverage the impact of their work in many ways, including:

- 1 Expanding immigrant civic engagement** through efforts to raise the visibility and public support for immigrant civic participation; naturalize immigrants; expand English-as-a-second language (ESL) programs; provide political and civic education; and motivate immigrants to participate in the political process.
- 2 Increasing the capacity of groups rooted in immigrant communities** to undertake voter engagement work through immigrant leadership development; increasing capacity to use voter files effectively; and understanding the legal parameters for their engagement in nonpartisan political activities.
- 3 Supporting the integration of voter engagement into the core work of immigrant organizations**, including helping groups overcome barriers of language, culture, and fear; increasing their capacity to scale up early in the election cycle; and sustaining their ability to engage in nonpartisan electoral organizing of immigrants on a continuing basis.
- 4 Funding coordination and economies of scale** through support of coalitions and intermediaries that build the capacity of immigrant organizations doing electoral work; create opportunities for peer learning; and work in multiple states with significant immigrant populations.
- 5 Prioritizing the need to protect and enfranchise immigrants** by supporting research on and documentation of voter suppression issues specific to the immigrant community; funding effective programs and policies that protect and promote the franchise among immigrants; and supporting coordination among immigrant groups and other groups undertaking voter engagement and voting rights work, allowing these groups to derive mutual benefit from the deep work they are doing in their respective fields.

In supporting civic participation efforts, foundations play an important role in advancing social change. Indeed, their investments have been crucial to starting and/or sustaining many of the projects highlighted in this action brief. As cosponsors of this action brief, the Funders' Committee for Civic Participation (FCCP) and Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees (GCIR) invite you explore the following pages to learn about immigrant organizing initiatives that integrate voter engagement. This action brief will help

funders—both those supporting immigrant issues and those supporting broader strategies of organizing, advocacy, and civic engagement—learn about how integrating voter engagement can strengthen immigrant organizations and increase their impact on broader community issues. It will also help funders focused on nonpartisan electoral work learn about ways to leverage their investment in voter engagement and mobilization through ongoing investments in immigrant community organizations between election cycles.

We urge you to consider how supporting nonpartisan integrated voter engagement strategies can meet your foundation's goals by building immigrant leadership, addressing critical social, economic and political issues facing our country, and strengthening our democracy.

For foundations concerned about supporting voter engagement activities because of their political nature, entering this field will require learning about laws governing philanthropic support of and nonprofit engagement in nonpartisan electoral work. It is important to note that U.S. tax laws provide substantial opportunity for public charities, private foundations, corporations, and individuals to support such efforts. Private foundations, community foundations, public charities, individual donors, and corporations have a long history of supporting nonpartisan voter engagement work. Foundations can (and should) support nonpartisan civic/voter engagement activities, and nonprofits can (and should) integrate nonpartisan civic/voter engagement activities into their ongoing missions and work. Our democracy demands the attention and engagement of all Americans, and nonprofits are particularly critical to providing the means for educating and motivating Americans to get engaged.

However, the laws and Internal Revenue Code's regulations that guide nonpartisan voter engagement grantmaking can be confusing. What types of groups are eligible to conduct nonpartisan electoral activities? What activities might foundation resources support? The FCCP's newly released publication, *Voter Registration, Education, and Ballot Campaigns: A Funders' Guide to Legal Issues*, answers these types of questions and provides guidance regarding restrictions that apply to particular types of voter engagement work and for different categories of funders (available at [www.gcir.org](http://www.gcir.org) and soon to be available on FCCP website, which is under construction). It is important to note, however, that the booklet does *not* serve as legal advice; funders are encouraged to consult their own legal counsel regarding specific questions. (See Appendix A for a list of legal resources on funding electoral participation.)

## INTRODUCTION: THE CHANGING DEMOGRAPHIC OF AMERICA

**R**ecord-breaking diversity and growth of the immigrant population in recent decades have created a demographic imperative for the integration of newcomers into American society and democracy. Today's immigrant and refugee families come from every corner of the globe. Mexico is the leading country of origin (38 percent), followed by Asian countries (23 percent), other Latin American countries (20 percent), Europe and Canada (12 percent), and Africa, the Middle East, and others (8 percent)<sup>1</sup>.

As a result of global economic and political factors, the foreign-born population in the United States has nearly tripled over the last four decades. An estimated 37 million immigrants of all status live in the United States, constituting nearly 12 percent of the total population. This figure is expected to increase to 43 million by 2010, making immigrants 13.5 percent of the U.S. population<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, increasing numbers of these immigrants are becoming citizens. More than one in three immigrants (12.4 million) is a naturalized citizen, and at least another eight million are eligible to naturalize<sup>3</sup>. Given these naturalization trends, demographers project that immi-

grants will represent a considerably larger share of the electorate in the next two decades.

Although two-thirds of all immigrants remain concentrated in the six traditional gateway states<sup>4</sup>, many are now living, working, and going to school in communities well beyond traditional urban receiving areas. In states never before considered immigrant destinations, the foreign-born population during the 1990s grew at twice the rate of the traditional gateway states<sup>5</sup>. In fact, the immigrant population doubled in 19 new-growth states. States that experienced the highest growth rate include North Carolina (274 percent), Georgia (233 percent), Nevada (202 percent), Arkansas (196 percent), and Utah (171 percent)<sup>6</sup>. This dispersed settlement pattern means that immigrant civic participation and voter engagement will have a more widespread impact, now and in the foreseeable future.

As their numbers continue to grow and as they become more engaged in all levels of civic life and the political process, immigrants and their families, with strategic community interventions and foundation investment, can play an important role in strengthening American democracy.

<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey S. Passel and Roberto Suro, "Rise, Peak, and Decline: Trends in U.S. Immigration 1992-2004," (Washington, D.C.: Pew Hispanic Center, September, 2003). (Note: Due to rounding the percentage breakdown does not total 100 percent.)

<sup>2</sup> Randy Capps, et al, "The New Demography of America's Schools: Immigration and the No Child Left Behind Act," (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, September 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Michael Fix, J. Passel, and K. Sucher, "Trends in Naturalization," (Washington, D.C.: Immigrant Families and Workers Series, September, 2003), Brief No. 3.

<sup>4</sup> California, New York, Florida, Texas, New Jersey, and Illinois.

<sup>5</sup> Michael E. Fix, Wendy Zimmerman, and Jeffrey S. Passel, "The Integration of Immigrant Families in the United States," (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey S. Passel and Wendy Zimmermann, "Are Immigrants Leaving California?" (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 2001), 6.

## INTEGRATED VOTER ENGAGEMENT

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any immigrant groups engaged in organizing, issue advocacy, and civic participation work have traditionally considered voter engagement as a cyclical activity, tangentially connected to their work. But in recent years, many groups have come to view elections as a great opportunity to call attention to issues of most concern to them and have integrated voter engagement into their ongoing organizing and advocacy work to advance their mission and address longstanding community concerns.

How does integrated voter engagement add value for community organizations and foundations interested in moving public policy and effecting social change? Nonpartisan electoral work can generate heightened public recognition in an election cycle, propelling issue campaigns to the next level. Voter outreach and engagement activities present opportunities for immigrant groups to train, strengthen, expand, and energize their volunteer base. Such activities also help groups increase their presence and credibility in the community and build or enhance their relationships with residents.

But organizations first need to develop particular skills and tools before they can effectively integrate voter engagement into their work, and foundations can play a pivotal role in helping groups to build this capacity. Community-based organizations need resources to plan and to incorporate nonpartisan electoral organizing as an ongoing part of their issue-based or constituency-based organizing. For example, groups that excel at deep organizing work must be able to expand

their scale in order to make a difference in an electoral context. While public policy work may deal with hundreds at a hearing, groups must be able to deal with thousands in the electoral arena. Taking advantage of local, state, and national elections to engage constituents continually demands that groups plan and develop the staff capacity to ramp up their activity level during the few months prior to an election, i.e., to recruit, train, and work with volunteers.

Foundations already supporting nonpartisan electoral work often focus their funding on election cycles, and this strategy remains critically important to the field. However, such foundations may also wish to consider an ongoing investment in immigrant organizations doing integrated voter engagement because their ability to sustain community involvement between election cycles amplifies their capacity and effectiveness in mobilizing volunteers and voters in subsequent elections.

# TOP TEN LESSONS ON EMBEDDING VOTER ENGAGEMENT WORK IN IMMIGRANT ORGANIZING

## 1 Elections are building blocks

Nonpartisan electoral work has become a key strategy for immigrant groups. Immigrant leaders have found that this work builds organizational assets—leadership, visibility, political clout, outreach, allies, access to public officials, and contacts in the community. Some cite numerous benefits to the organization as reason to continue and expand their work; others see broader social change as the primary motivation. But this is a relatively new phenomenon; not too long ago, immigrant organizations felt that voter engagement work was divisive because many within the immigrant community cannot vote. Now, many organizations report that those who cannot vote are among their most enthusiastic volunteers and are very effective in mobilizing others to vote, giving them a sense of both the privilege and the responsibility of voting. Approaches that target only citizens are missing out on an opportunity to use the elections to build community broadly and to increase civic learning.

## 2 Turn voters into advocates (and vice-versa)

Sustained voter engagement work can advance advocacy on important community issues. Immigrant-serving organizations increasingly recognize that engaging their constituents in voting is an important tool in protecting the well-being of their communities, creating public visibility for the issues they care most about, and overcoming the barriers limiting full civic participation by immigrant communities. Elections are an opportunity for immigrant communities to demonstrate their ability to act as full participants in American democracy. They have concrete timelines and cycles—and they have high visibility. They also create a powerful way to mobilize community members around issues. Effective groups make sure that every door knock and every telephone call is also about the issues that are of concern to their communities.

More importantly, electoral work creates opportunities for immigrant communities to have an equal voice in public affairs, by demonstrating their effectiveness in influencing participation in the electoral process. It allows immigrant communities to develop or deepen relationships with policymakers, giving them access to those policymakers on issues of importance to immigrant constituencies. As one organizer said, “When we plopped down a big stack of voter registrations from his district, it changed the tenor of our conversation with the representative. He listened more attentively.”

Organizations can benefit from engaging continuously in electoral work, but to really leverage this work they must not only demonstrate their effectiveness to policymakers but also demonstrate some fairly immediate benefits to keep their constituents engaged.

## 3 Cultural and linguistic competence are paramount

Barriers to full immigrant participation remain. Much of the work described here focuses on low-income immigrant communities in which significant numbers have not previously voted. Many in these communities need access to voter information that is in their native language, and there is often a dearth of translated materials available.

Materials for immigrants must not only be linguistically and culturally appropriate; they often need to be made accessible for populations with low literacy. For some communities with an oral tradition, printed materials need to be augmented with oral or visual aids.

**“We ask what are the resources that our members all need in common. For example, it was difficult for us to get election machines from the Board of Elections to take out into the communities so that people could learn how to use them. So we made videos in about six languages, with immigrant leaders demonstrating what has to be done; we used the voting machines at the Board of Elections. We showed how to do it [voting] from the very beginning of walking into the polling place, right up through using the machine. We’d found over the years that some of the polling places here are very complicated, with five or six districts voting in one place. People would wait for hours in line, only to be faced with a poorly trained, and perhaps exhausted poll worker who does not speak the language of the immigrant, stressed out, telling them they are not in the book—but not explaining that they are referring to the book for this machine, and never telling them that the other machines are for other electoral districts and that they need to find the right one, and the right line. We incorporated our knowledge of what has gone on, on the ground, into the video. We do a lot of materials development work for the groups.”**

Margie McHugh,  
New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC)

Immigrant voter education must address different cultural issues in terms of what it means to vote, including what that means in the home country of the newcomers. Addressing these issues frequently requires specific background knowledge. Many immigrants come from countries where voting is considered meaningless; others come from places where corruption pervades the system, or where the country is run by a dictator and death squads, from places where family members may have been killed for running for office, voting, or trying to create social change through other peaceful means.

Voter education must also help immigrants gain a basic understanding of the voting process, including finding the polling place, getting to the ballot box or voting machine, and filling out the ballot—all of which can be complicated and intimidating.

Getting immigrants to understand the process and to go to the polling place is not enough. It is also important to assure that there are poll workers who can address the needs of non-English-speaking immigrants in their own languages. Some groups train staff or volunteers as poll workers; others advocate with local government to ensure that competent poll workers will be able to provide assistance in the relevant languages. Ensuring adequate numbers of poll workers with the necessary qualifications is an effective way for local organizers to minimize problems at the polls and increase the confidence level of immigrant voters.

The surge of anti-immigrant sentiment and activities has created a major barrier to immigrant civic and political participation. Beyond voting, many immigrants are reluctant to engage in public life, generally because they are afraid. Many undocumented immigrants try to remain invisible, especially in some

regions of the country where immigrant groups may feel hostility from the larger community. Those new citizens eligible to vote may face obstacles to voting that the native-born do not, including being challenged about their eligibility to vote, inconsistent and inappropriate identification requirements, and inadequate signage that often results in people standing in the wrong lines. In communities with a high concentration of immigrants, it is especially important to train volunteers to monitor polls and set up systems for administrative or legal support where problems arise.

#### 4 Tap your trusted sources

Trust is essential to effective electoral work with immigrant communities. Many immigrant communities are wary of outsiders, but are willing to listen to leaders within their own communities. Generally, groups found that the most effective voter mobilizations were those in which constituents were personally contacted by members of their own communities. Mutual understanding is critical for creating trust, and the community-based organizations (CBOs) serving immigrant communities typically have the capacity to communicate in ways that build trust. These organizations are also close to the ground, so they are aware of the issues that are of importance to their communities. Groups can host community forums, deliberations, and debates on issues, so that constituents can better understand issues, learn about candidates and ballot measures, and thus make informed choices when they go to vote.

**“Two weeks before the November election a lot of effort and money came down to challenge low-income voters, largely Latinos and African-Americans, all around the state. For example, just a couple of days before the election a radio talk show host said that all the Latinos going to the polls would be undocumented. This created the climate and justified all kinds of racial profiling and additional challenges at the polls. There was a protest against the racism [but only] after the election. There was a real effort to keep low-income people away from the polls. We had a very strong election protection coalition effort. We were in charge on the South Side of Milwaukee. We had well trained people and lots of volunteer lawyers and we actively defended the right to vote.”**

Christine Neumann-Ortiz  
Voces de la Frontera,  
Milwaukee, WI

**“Our coalition came together in 2001 around a campaign to support state legislation that allowed people to get drivers licenses regardless of whether they had a social security number. The law passed, but we have had to defend it in the following years. Politicians always asked what kind of voting constituency we had, but we never had the funds to do electoral work until 2004. We learned a lot about electoral work, and we are continuing to learn; but we do know our communities. We know what works, as far as trust issues and getting volunteers motivated. Trust is such an important issue in the immigrant community! We really believe in the community-based approach to this electoral work. If you are based in the community, and you know the dynamics and the politics and have relationships with the volunteers, you are just so much more effective than those who come in from the outside just around elections.”**

David Lubell,  
Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee  
Rights Coalition (TIRRC), Nashville, TN

## 5 Ethnic media are key allies

Ethnic media reach deeply into immigrant communities. A comprehensive poll of ethnic American adults—African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans, Arab Americans, and Native Americans—conducted by Bendixen & Associates in 2005 indicates that 29 million adults (45 percent of the 64 million ethnic adults studied) prefer ethnic television, radio, or newspapers to their mainstream counterparts. Many of these “primary consumers” rely on ethnic media for information about politics and government; among the Hispanics polled, more than twice as many relied on ethnic media than did on mainstream media for this kind of information.

Ethnic media play an important role in educating immigrants about local voting processes and what is required to participate. These media also disseminate information about issues, candidates, and volunteer opportunities. More than that, they can be active, strategic partners in the electoral work of immigrant CBOs, helping them reach segments of the population not reached by any other sources. For example, for some groups there are no reliable ethnic contact lists for outreach, and in many areas public voter lists are fragmentary; but those immigrants seek out media that broadcast in their languages. The reach of ethnic media is broad as well as deep: the poll indicates that 51 million adults—about a quarter of the U.S. adult population—are reached by the ethnic media on a regular basis.

## 6 Develop ties that bind

Successful voter work deepens organizational relationships with the community. Even for CBOs that already have a history of advocacy and community organizing, engaging in electoral work can strengthen their relationships with the community. Creating a successful voter drive requires extensive contact and exchange with the community. Many organizations have found the stretch surprising, challenging, and beneficial. For those that have focused more internally on developing their own core organizational leadership, that voter work forced them to go out and talk to everyone in the community, however they defined community.

Most groups reported that, although this work is demanding, it has strengthened their organizations rather than depleted them. Many organizations also reported increases in volunteers—the volunteers enjoyed the voter work, and many stayed involved with the organization after the election.

Above all, groups found that voter work actually increased their visibility and led to new alliances. Involvement in coordinated voter work provides immigrant organizations with opportunities to interact with peer organizations, some of

**“One of the benefits of the electoral work for our coalition has been just going deeper into the community. Going into apartment houses, for example, where nobody had ever heard of us, and meeting people. Contacting a broader sector of our constituency and getting to meet other constituencies, too. For example, we had much more contact with African Americans while we were doing this electoral work. And we went into high schools—the schools invited us in.”**

David Lubell,  
TIRRC, Nashville, TN

**“Really everyone in the organization has now seen the results of how important it is to them to build their constituency in every area we work in and to have that constituency to be politically engaged. It has raised the level of their advocacy work, and it has improved their ability to analyze what is important in their communities—that is always changing, you have to keep tracking it. And all of this has helped many groups to be more accountable to their constituencies—the voter work means the organization gets more immediate and more direct feedback from the community. That creates a truer community dialogue.”**

Margie McHugh,  
New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC), New York

**“One thing that worked well was that all the electoral organizing was tied to immigrant justice organizing: a path to citizenship, reuniting families, civil rights and civil liberties. The emphasis was different for different ethnic communities, but everyone saw themselves reflected in this. Our work was aspirational: our families, our America, our vote: protect our families.”**

Joshua Hoyt  
ICIRR, Chicago, IL

which are working with different populations in the same neighborhoods. In some cases, organizations that have worked in close proximity for years have first interacted and sometimes found ways to collaborate through voter engagement work. By building and learning from each other's strengths, they have been able to accomplish much more in collaboration than each could independently.

Engaging the community at this level sometimes requires a reallocation of resources from an organization's internal capacity building, or from other programmatic priorities, to broader outreach and constituency building. Nevertheless, these sometimes difficult adjustments are in the direction of greater involvement in and greater accountability to the community served, and they lead to more support for the organization.

## 7 Frame it!

Develop messages that speak to specific immigrant groups—but that fit into a common, overarching frame.

In 2004, many immigrant groups were able to both develop specific messages for particular constituencies and to fit these into an overarching frame that ties together diverse immigrant constituencies, like the power of the immigrant/new citizen vote. Voter work has required that CBOs find messages that are of interest to a broad spectrum of residents. Sometimes this work meant facing divisive issues within the immigrant community. Yet, it was clear to the organizations that, if they were going to increase the voice of immigrants, they had to find messages that would bring groups together—especially immigrant and refugee groups of various backgrounds, although in some key instances coalitions with labor, faith-based groups, and others were also important. The various groups learn from each other, and the work creates solidarity and increases understanding across immigrant communities.

An effective campaign needs to address issues of immediate interest in the local community, moving beyond the traditional range of “immigrant rights” issues to include a broader agenda addressing priorities such as education, housing, jobs, health, and safety. Mobilize the Immigrant Vote (MIV) in California led a series of community forums where immigrants discussed issues and staked out positions on proposed ballot initiatives; this bottom-up process created MIV's platform and the multi-lingual voter guide that was distributed to thousands of community members. Through this experience, participating CBOs learned more about how to conduct grassroots voter education so that it builds community capacity to analyze policy issues.

## 8 Leverage the “middleman”

As immigrant CBOs increase their electoral work, coalitions and intermediary organizations can play important roles in supporting that work. Most of the CBOs need some kinds of support to be effective in electoral work, but the kinds of support they need varies widely. Coalitions, intermediaries, and collaborations are distinct kinds of forums that may provide specific kinds of support including:

- Bringing CBOs together for peer learning and helping them discover common purpose;
- Providing leadership development and political education training and opportunities to CBO staff and volunteers (the most effective intermediaries and coalitions make leadership development a core function);
- Helping CBOs gain a deeper understanding of the American electoral system and helping them develop some specific competencies to “translate” campaign technologies and expertise in ways that are maximally useful for these organizations and their immigrant constituents;
- Offering communications expertise, including developing common messages across ethnic and cultural lines and producing well-designed multi-lingual education and outreach materials;
- Making available simultaneous interpretation services that allow groups to work across language barriers; and
- Offering fundraising assistance.

**“The groups compare notes. What kinds of events worked for what populations? Some with older populations found it hard to get them to turn out around school system issues. Some had a hard time getting people to support a civil rights agenda due to the anti-immigrant backlash. How to get their constituency active across the whole range of issues that are important to the coalition? The ethic of the work among the diverse groups in the coalition is ‘you are there to support me, and I am there to support you.’ It is about reciprocal support among the CBOs. This is an important backdrop to our voter engagement work. How, for example, to get Latino voters interested in the concerns of Muslim, Arab and South Asian voters.”**

Margie McHugh, NYC

**“In the statewide Mobilize the Immigrant Vote Campaign, it seemed important to make room for very diverse organizations. There were large and small organizations; there were ones that had a quite a bit of electoral experience and those that had never thought about elections—for them, basic materials could be very valuable. But perhaps most interesting was the diversity in the level of commitment to the effort. Some just responded to an e-mail, filled in some forms, received materials, and did not participate much more than that in the campaign, as far as we know. Others were full partners, fully committed. Wherever they were, this was a way in, and they all learned.”**

Laura Lanzerotti

Consultant to Mobilize the Immigrant Vote (MIV) San Francisco

## **9 (Hip) Hop with the Millennials**

Young volunteers are a vital, new constituency for immigrant electoral organizing. Immigrant youth, from the undocumented to the second generation, were enthusiastic supporters of voter engagement work in 2004. Regardless of their immigration status, all were excited about participating because they felt that they have a stake in the future of this country.

The motivations for youth electoral involvement differed from one immigrant community to another. All across the United States, Latino youth were particularly drawn by the DREAM Act, a federal proposal to facilitate and support the ability of undocumented students to pursue higher education and legalize their status. Many Asian youth responded to messages about family reunification, and Muslim youth were particularly drawn to issues around civil rights. In all these cases, for both foreign-born and second-generation immigrant youth, the underlying issue was fair treatment of immigrants.

Regardless of their motivation for participation, immigrant youth are becoming engaged in larger numbers, and community organizers are learning how to tap into their energy and engage them more fully.

Young people represent major demographic blocs of potential voters, particularly in the Latino and Arab American communities. Electoral organizing in these communities is providing opportunities for all immigrants and children of immigrants to become more involved in civic life. In turn, these young people are injecting new life into our democracy.

**“Youth was a huge part of the legs that moved us, not only their energy, but because they were there, over 1,000 strong on Election Day...we were able to engage some constituencies we never had before. As an immigrant rights organization, we tend not to relate to second-generation folks; and suddenly our second-generation was invigorated, especially in the Asian American community. Fairly affluent, they don’t see themselves as having immigration issues, but they do see voter work as a way both of connecting with the older generation and creating more influence for themselves. Here in Chicago, we are seeing especially Indian and Filipino second generation people wanting to get into the neighborhoods and work door to door—and they are staying on with the organization. This is new! Some of them feel that political parties have not reached out to them, so this is a nonpartisan avenue of influence for them. And it took an immigrants’ rights organization to reach out to them.”**

Marissa Graciosa, ICIRR,  
Chicago, IL

## 10 Bring in 21<sup>st</sup> century tools

Technology can increase the effectiveness of immigrant voter engagement efforts. The 2004 elections sparked a growing interest in using voter databases to enhance the effectiveness of voter contacts. Some groups attempted for the first time to utilize state, county, or vendor-supplied files with information on registered voters as a more accurate means to mobilize constituents. Yet, the use of voter databases is complicated by incompatible systems, lack of training for organizers, and the lack of reliable standards guiding the quality of information on raw voter lists. Some organizers have complained of expensive purchases of ethnic directories, for example, that proved to be worthless on the ground. Still, it is clear that voter files are critical to effective electoral outreach, and CBOs need training and ongoing support to effectively use voter files and manage databases.

**“One reason we need sustained funding for year-round work is because things change so fast. We need capacity to keep up the relationships. People in low-income neighborhoods move so much. We had to throw away some of our data. It would cost more to adjust it than start over. You have to keep up all the time.”**

**Christine Neumann-Ortiz,  
Voces de la Frontera, Milwaukee, WI**

Managing these lists offers many other organizational benefits as well: opportunities to test the effectiveness of messages and to evaluate work; to follow up on contacts and build membership; and to demonstrate to funders and to politicians the heft and effectiveness of the organizing work. For example, Mobilize the Immigrant Vote reports that a number of their member organizations in California are doing ongoing organizing work using lists that were created for the 2004 electoral work.

## CASE STUDIES

### Movement-Building Approach to Electoral Organizing

The statewide Mobilize the Immigrant Vote (MIV) campaign in California focused on bringing a growing and underrepresented segment of the population more fully into the political process. The MIV campaign sees community-based organizations as a critical infrastructure for catalyzing and sustaining civic and political participation in local communities. Though increasing voter turnout among immigrants was a prime goal of the effort, MIV promoted a movement-building approach to elections as a way to both increase the voices of immigrants in the 2004 elections and *also* build capacity in immigrant communities for active participation in creating long-term social change.

MIV illustrates the differences between a traditional electoral campaign and a movement-building campaign through four dimensions:

1. Instead of ending a campaign after the election, the movement-building approach makes elections one part of a long-term strategy for changing communities which includes ongoing civic participation and organizing efforts *between* elections;
2. Instead of viewing the campaign as won or lost depending on election results, a movement-building strategy understands that the electoral work builds relationships and energizes communities regardless of election outcomes;
3. Instead of focusing on likely voters, the movement-building approach views voting as one of many ways to empower the disenfranchised and bring about change, and it understands that there is a place in electoral work for everyone, whether they are eligible to vote or not; and
4. Instead of focusing solely on the number of contacts made in the campaign, the movement-building approach also focuses on strengthening organizations and communities by increasing visibility, forging new alliances, developing a stronger base of community leaders and volunteers, and linking election issue to ongoing organizing.

The Partnership for Immigrant Leadership and Action (PILA) led the MIV campaign, in collaboration with the Bay Area Immigrant Rights Coalition, California Partnership (of the Center for Community Change), Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles, National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights and Services, and Immigrant Rights and Education Network. The budget for this statewide effort in 2004 was approximately \$255,000; \$100,000 was raised from foundations, and the remainder was contributed in-kind by these six collaborative partners.

In the 2004 campaign, MIV linked 112 diverse immigrant-focused, community-based organizations across California in an electoral organizing effort. Many of these groups had never engaged in such work before, and nearly a third (32 percent) reported that they would not have done so without MIV support. To strengthen their capacity, MIV offered community-based organizations nonpartisan voter education materials in a number of languages, workshops on electoral basics and issue analysis, media advocacy training, and ongoing technical assistance. Ultimately, the campaign engaged 1,239 volunteers and educated and mobilized tens of thousands of immigrant voters for the 2004 elections. MIV also began to forge a multi-ethnic, statewide movement through building relationships and trust among grassroots organizations. Fifty-nine percent of organizations that participated in the campaign collaborated with other organizations they had never worked with before to carry out electoral activities, and 95 percent affirmed that they want to be part of future MIV campaigns.

### Youth Activism and Immigrant Organizing

Students at Horlick High School in Racine, Wisconsin, were prompted by their Latino-American History class discussions on racism and the immigrant experience in the United States to organize as Students United for Immigrant Rights (SUIR). Initially most of the students were second- and third-generation Chicanos, with a small number of new immigrant students. An English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) class of immigrants then joined in the discussion. The students attended a rally organized by Voces de la Frontera (Voces), an emerging immigrant rights coalition in Milwaukee, and they invited their high school teachers/sponsors to go with them.

This rally event was covered in the *Racine Journal-Times*, eliciting anti-immigrant letters to the paper. The group of students taking Latino-American History discussed these letters in class and then wrote group and individual rebuttals, which were published in the newspaper, engaging the community in a discussion of immigrant issues.

Voces helped arrange for some of the students to testify at hearings in the Wisconsin Assembly for a bill permitting undocumented students to attend state institutions of higher learning at resident tuition rates. Shortly afterward Voces invited some of the students and one of their sponsors to go to Washington, D.C., to participate in activities related to the DREAM Act. Students received training and spent a day talking to elected officials.

Originally, there had been some tensions between the new immigrant and the Chicano students, but as they worked together in these activities they began to relate more closely. Together, they organized a large Cinco de Mayo party—partly as a fundraiser to help pay the expenses for the trip to Washington. Hundreds of Latino students, family members, community members, and school officials came together for the first time. Students spoke about their participation in the political process.

Publicity about the student participation and about the celebration sparked criticism from some community members at the next Racine Board of Education meeting: they demanded the board dismiss the history teacher who had sponsored the field trips. Voces then called a meeting of the parents of students who had been participating, and at the next meeting, the parents made a presentation thanking the board for giving their children the opportunity to participate in the field trips and to learn about democratic processes. All of this generated interest among other students at the school, and it was then that Students United for Immigrant Rights (SUIR) was formed.

In partnership with other community organizations, Voces undertook a number of electoral organizing activities in 2004. In the fall, SUIR, Voces, and the NAACP together planned a nonpartisan Election Day get-out-the-vote campaign. Interested Horlick students learned about door-to-door campaigning and were provided ward maps from the city clerk's office. The school approved the event and gave permission for the students who wished to participate to be absent from school on Election Day.

A few days before the election, community members associated with an anti-immigrant website asserted that the mobilization drive, aimed in particular at low-income neighborhoods in Racine with a concentration of African Americans and Latinos, was partisan in nature and that it was inappropriate for the school to allow such activities. On the Monday before elections, the school administration withdrew its support of the event and announced that students who did not attend classes on Tuesday would be disciplined.

On Thursday after the elections, the *Racine Journal-Times* ran a story saying that over 250 Horlick High School students ignored the Racine Unified School District's withdrawal of support, "choosing to miss any classroom social studies experience for the chance to participate in the real thing." The organizers noted that an additional 170 students (total school population is approximately 2,150) were detained from boarding the buses. The students were willing to face penalties in school as well as rain and cold weather in order to encourage others to vote. Students from freshman to seniors walked neighborhoods in groups that included a volunteer adult chaperone. *Xavier Marques, a 16-year-old student, was quoted as saying, "I feel really disappointed in the school district for withdrawing their support in our effort to get people to vote. For them to fold just because of a little bit of pressure from an outside group is wrong. From the beginning we have been nonpartisan. We are just focused on getting out the vote."*

### Higher Calling in Cook County

The Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR), Chicago, IL, was one of the intensive site partners selected by the Center for Community Change to participate in its Community Voting Project. In 2004, as part of its New Americans Democracy Project, ICIRR led electoral organizing in 14 communities, working in partnership with local community organizations and leaders. In one of those communities—in suburban southwestern Chicago—ICIRR partnered with the Muslim Civil Rights Center (MCRC) and the Universal School in Bridgeview (Universal). Although neither of these community organizations had ever done electoral organizing before, in 2004 they responded to ICIRR's invitation.

Since 1998, MCRC has worked to educate and raise awareness among Muslims in the United States regarding civil and human rights issues. Universal is an award-winning Islamic school with classes from preschool through high school; it has developed academic curriculum for Islamic studies, and it has involved students in a variety of community services. These organizations are located in and serve a community with a concentrated Muslim population that has had relatively low voter turnout. All three organizations saw this as an opportunity for that population to strengthen its voice.

In March 2004, the three partner organizations began planning the local electoral campaign together, developing goals, issues, and targets. In May, eight representatives of MCRC and Universal began to participate in ICIRR's Campaign Institute; three were staff of the community organizations, and five were teenage students from Universal. These were the leaders who would participate in implementing the campaign and would organize and recruit other volunteers for work in their community.

The Campaign Institute was a key strategy in ICIRR's electoral work. Participants met for a full day of campaign training every Saturday for seven months. There, over a hundred community leaders from immigrant organizations in and around Chicago—

Asians, Latinos, and Europeans—got to know each other. They listened to consultants and strategists; they learned voter registration and get-out-the-vote campaign tactics, targeting, how to use voter files, how to develop messages to mobilize voters. Together they built their organizing skills and learned how to translate the expertise of the political consultants into their own cultural idioms. Most importantly, they began to build common ground among themselves.

In July, ICIRR hired organizers to direct the voter mobilization work in each of the 14 communities where they were organizing; the organizers prepared daily reports to ICIRR on numbers, rallies, phone bank activity, and whether these were meeting the goals that had been set. They activated approximately 750 volunteers across the metropolitan area on Election Day. As in traditional electoral campaigns, these organizers were trained outsiders brought into the neighborhood. ICIRR says that one important lesson it learned from the work in 2004 is to recruit the organizers from within the community and provide them with whatever training they need. This may mean starting earlier, but it also ensures that the organizers have a stake in the community and are likely to stay there after the election—so the training builds capacity that is sustained within the community.

The organizer in the Muslim community had workspace in the MCRC office, where a staff member advised him on the local community—the “lay of the land.” The Universal School provided him a base of student volunteers who, after school, did phone bank and door-to-door work.

The student volunteers, some of whom are studying Arabic as a second language in school, were able to connect with many of the older community residents. Six nights a week, in working teams of five, the students called newly registered and infrequent voters in the community. Others, chaperoned by adult volunteers, went door-to-door, asking people to exercise their right to vote. This youthful, nonpartisan, culturally competent outreach to mobilize voters seems to have facilitated a willingness to listen, and it caught the imagination and interest of the media. It was front-page news that the Mosque and MCRC were registering voters. In October the *Daily Southtown* ran a prominent article with photos, “Election 2004: Higher Calling” about Universal’s phone bank volunteers:

*...the hijab-clad teenage girls were participating in what they say is a civic duty and, during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, a religious act: reminding people to vote.*

The former principal of Universal said, “Most of [the volunteers] are the children of immigrants. During Ramadan, they’re missing their *iftar* (the fast-breaking meal), they’re missing spending time with their families, all so that they can be a part of the civic education of their community.”

After the 2004 election, the local congressman made his first-ever visit to the Mosque. According to ICIRR, this community is getting more involved in local issues, such as planning and development; they want more of a voice in what happens in the neighborhoods around the Mosque, as well as in issues of civil rights for Muslims. And ICIRR is gearing up for its 2006 suburban political training, “Beyond Election Day: Making Electoral Organizing Work for Us.”

### Creating Immigrant Visibility in a New Gateway State

Census figures show that the Hispanic population in Tennessee grew by 278 percent between 1990 and 2000; most observers say that is, at best, a conservative estimate. However, there are also many non-Hispanic immigrants in the area. The census shows that in 2000, 7 percent of Nashville-Davidson County residents were foreign born; two-thirds of them had arrived since 1990, and three-quarters of them were not citizens. Many were poor; many were refugees from Southeast Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. (Nashville has the largest Kurdish community in the United States.) Among the new gateway cities in the South, Nashville has the largest proportion of non-Latino immigrants.

The Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC) in Nashville, TN, began in 2001 as a union of grassroots immigrant leaders, groups and their allies and has worked to bring together the diverse immigrant groups in the region. David Lubell, Executive Director of TIRRC, says many of the Latinos are undocumented and that it has been an effort to define interests that brings them together with those who have arrived with refugee status. The post-September 11<sup>th</sup> anti-immigrant backlash, however, has facilitated that objective. He also says that because immigrant organizing is still in its infancy in Tennessee, there are not many other resources for the community groups.

In 2004, with a couple of small grants provided through intermediary organizations—the Center for Community Change and the National Council of La Raza—TIRRC began electoral organizing of immigrants; it was the first time anyone had ever done this in Tennessee. They organized voter registration drives and get-out-the-vote campaigns across the state. Lubell says the learning curve was steep, and the organization was stretched by the effort.

Electoral organizing for the coalition and for its member organizations has a practical end: defending immigrant and refugee rights, and that requires a certain standing and credibility. In 2004 TIRRC discovered how electoral organizing gives the coalition and its members opportunities to get the kind of visibility that results in more influence. A central event of the campaign

was a press conference TIRRC organized in Nashville on October 22, 2004, announcing its efforts to mobilize the new American voting community in Tennessee.

The news conference was carefully planned. TIRRC worked with leaders of member organizations to develop the press release and prepare speakers for the conference. The conference and press release were timed to receive maximum exposure in media election coverage: local affiliates of National Public Radio (NPR) and all the broadcast networks covered the event. Speakers included members of the Islamic Center of Nashville, the Nigerian National Association, and Conexión Américas. It was exciting for these leaders to be involved, and it helped to build their credibility and the visibility of their organizations as well as the skills of the organization and its members. It also illustrated to politicians and the public the voter strength of immigrants in the area. Several public officials contacted the organization as a result of the conference, and it has helped to establish TIRRC as an active organization that commands attention.

Lubell says that original press conference has had positive ripple effects. In March 2005, TIRRC hosted a legislative reception to advocate against pending anti-immigrant legislation. Over 25 politicians attended the reception, which was well covered by the press. Some of the same member leaders spoke at the reception as at the press conference, but it was clear that both their confidence and their public speaking skills had improved. Some of those politicians who attended the reception helped to kill the targeted anti-immigrant legislation in committee.

### **New American Leaders: Leadership Development for Engagement**

The New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) has been supporting its members to do electoral organizing for the past decade. Margie McHugh, Senior Policy and Program Advisor, and former Executive Director of the NYIC, says that the members' voter work the foundation for all that the coalition does, and it cuts across all their issue areas. Several years ago members began to push the coalition to create leadership development opportunities for their staff—those who had been most active in voter work were in the forefront of the request. They were looking for opportunities to develop the seconds-in-command, program directors, and promising young people in their organizations.

By that time, these organizations had been focusing on electoral work for five years or more, and they felt that to be effective in this work they needed to learn more about how to build bridges to other kinds of organizations. They wanted their staff to have the opportunity to meet and have contact with leaders from across sectors, and they wanted them to gain an insider's view of how local government, political, nonprofit, corporate, and civic institutions work.

In response to these requests from members, NYIC developed an intensive seven-month program called The New American Leaders Fellowship for emerging and established leaders working with the immigrant communities of New York City. During the first two years of operation, it was funded by a Rockefeller Foundation grant, and it was developed in partnership with the CORO New York Leadership Center. The two-year foundation funding was not renewable, but NYIC has found the program to be so valuable that it is continuing it in 2006 without Coro's participation and without external funding.

The program aims to increase the leadership skills and the understanding of the community so that immigrants can be more influential in shaping the decisions that affect their communities. There are 24 fellows in each cycle of the program, selected to create a diverse body of fellows, reflective of the diversity of New York's immigrant communities.

Throughout the program, the fellows are encouraged to gain a better understanding of how decisions in the community are made and by whom. The fellows participate in panel discussions and small group interviews with corporate executives, government officials, and community leaders, as well as by making site visits. All of this gives them access to information that is ordinarily guarded and that can take a long time for the newcomers to learn. The program challenges participants to look beyond narrow interests and to understand conflicting viewpoints—a necessary first step to creating effective solutions for all the residents of the city. Fellows also receive training in critical strategies such as issue analysis, constituency building, cross-sector advocacy, budgeting and public finance, media campaigns and in other practices that help build effective leadership.

The New American Leaders program emphasizes the importance of building networks among the fellows and alumni of the program and with community leaders in business, government, and the nonprofit sector. The alumni from the first two cohorts of fellows remain actively involved in the program, and the quarterly alumni meetings with guest speakers are well attended. Many of the alumni see the relationships they are building through the program as some of their most valuable resources; they say that access to practical, action-oriented discussions with local policymakers has made them more effective in their work and has accelerated their development as leaders. The program has helped them develop a realistic map of local decision making and has created a sense of solidarity that they had not previously experienced.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDERS

**T**he lessons and best practices highlighted in this report illuminate a set of funding strategies suitable for a wide range of foundations, including those that are new to funding immigrant voter/civic engagement.

## 1 Expand immigrant civic engagement

- Encourage and support efforts to raise the visibility and public support for immigrant civic participation activities.
- Support a variety of civic engagement tools, including community forums, candidate forums, nonpartisan candidate training, adult civic literacy classes, and civic education in schools, especially those with immigrant children.
- Support immigrants through the naturalization process, including English classes, civics classes, lessons in how to navigate the system, and revolving loan programs to help immigrants pay for the naturalization process.
- Support immigrant civic integration through development of policies and programs at local, state, and federal levels.
- Support programs that enhance the opportunities and motivation for immigrant participation in the political process.

## 2 Increase the capacity of groups rooted in immigrant communities to undertake voter engagement work:

- Encourage and support voter engagement work by a range of nonprofits that already have a permanent presence in immigrant communities. This extension of their work will help build and sustain new relationships and capacity to achieve their mission.
- Support programs that develop the leadership of immigrant community members.
- Support software development, training, technical assistance, and other efforts to integrate the appropriate use of voter files in voter engagement and other immigrant organizing and advocacy strategies.
- Provide grantees with technical assistance related to legal questions on how nonprofits can engage in political activity in a nonpartisan way, and on how funders are legally able to support it.

## 3 Support the integration of voter engagement into the core work of immigrant organizations:

- Recognize that the immigrant community is one that requires more intensive investment to overcome barriers of language, culture, and fear.
- Support the expansion necessary to undertake scaled-up electoral work early in the election cycle, so that CBOs will have time to educate and mobilize volunteers to work in the community.
- Fund electoral organizing of immigrants on a continuing basis—and not just every four years—so that work at the crucial local and state levels is ongoing and the capacity is there to expand the work in an election cycle.

## 4 Fund coordination and economies of scale:

- Encourage and support ongoing programs and organizations (such as coalitions and intermediaries) that build the capacity of immigrant organizations doing electoral work and create opportunities for peer learning.
- Fund organizations that have been successful and innovative in organizing immigrants in multiple states with significant immigrant populations, where organizations have the capacity to develop materials, models, lessons, and curriculum that could be utilized in many parts of the country.

## 5 Prioritize the need to protect and enfranchise immigrants:

- Support research on and documentation of voter suppression issues specific to the immigrant community, to inform effective programs and policies that protect and promote the franchise among immigrants.
- Support coordination among immigrant groups and other community-based groups undertaking voter engagement and voting rights efforts so these groups can derive mutual benefit from the deep work they are doing in their respective fields.

## Appendix A Legal Resources on Funding Civic Participation

*Voter Registration, Education & Ballot Campaigns: A Funders' Guide to Legal Issues* provides a good overview on issues that affect voter engagement grantmaking. This easy-to-understand guide, which includes a section on the 20 most frequently asked questions, can be obtained through the Funders' Committee for Civic Participation and will soon be available on the FCCP website (under construction).

Alliance for Justice ([www.allianceforjustice.org](http://www.allianceforjustice.org)) offers resources to educate grantmakers on their legal rights to support nonprofit advocacy and nonpartisan voter engagement work.

Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest ([www.clpi.org](http://www.clpi.org)) works to promote, support, and protect nonprofit advocacy and lobbying to strengthen participation in our democratic society and advance charitable missions.



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Grantmakers Concerned with  
Immigrants and Refugees