



GETTING STARTED WITH WELCOMING WORK

FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT



Photo credit: Montgomery County, MD

WHY LOCAL GOVERNMENT?

Forward-thinking local governments recognize that creating welcoming communities in which people can contribute to their greatest potential is not just good government, it's smart economics. Regardless of the starting point, local governments can play a critical role in working with their communities to set an agenda, convene partners, and implement local policies and practices that expand immigrant inclusion and engage the broader receiving community.

WHAT IS A WELCOMING COMMUNITY?

Welcoming America defines a welcoming community as an inclusive place in which all people, including immigrants, have the opportunity to reach their greatest potential, engage with their neighbors, and fully contribute their talents – expanding prosperity and well-being for all.

WHAT ARE SOME FIRST STEPS WE CAN TAKE?

MAKE THE CASE

In order to remain economically and socially vibrant, it's more important than ever that local governments recognize the many benefits of forwarding a vision and action plan that promotes a welcoming community. Visit www.welcomingamerica.org to learn more about the imperatives for a welcoming city or county approach.

BUILD A LOCAL NETWORK OF PARTNERS

While all institutions can individually identify ways to become more inclusive, it takes a collective effort to create a welcoming community. Government can serve as a convener of the various partners from the community with a role to play. Start by bringing together stakeholders from across all sectors, including nonprofit, corporate, faith, and governmental organizations. Creating a network will help to build community support and identify existing resources while also leading to better coordination of services and the ability to leverage new ones.

ASSESS COMMUNITY ASSETS AND NEEDS

Many local governments start by working with their community partners to ask the simple question: what are we doing now to create a more welcoming community, what would our community look like if it were more welcoming, and where are the gaps? Research partners at local universities can be great collaborators in providing additional data.

CREATE A VISION AND PLAN

Efforts to create a welcoming community are most effective when there is a vision set and collaboration across sectors to implement the plan that draws on the voice of both immigrant and receiving community members. A number of local governments, businesses, and community organizations are successfully coming together to develop comprehensive welcoming plans, and Welcoming America has a number of trainings and tools available to support a planning effort, along with a Welcoming Framework to guide areas of focus. Communities may also want to align focus areas with other existing leadership priorities.

IMPLEMENT NEW POLICIES, PROGRAMS, AND PRACTICES – AND COMMUNICATE AND EVALUATE THEIR SUCCESS

Once a plan has been created, activities to support the goals and strategies of the plan should take place across the community and across multiple organizations. For example, the Welcome Dayton plan, which was crafted by the community and passed by the City of Dayton in 2011, continues to be implemented through the Welcome Dayton Initiative. A robust communications effort also helps to publicize the work and the value it brings to the community. Welcoming America is available to support communities as they communicate their efforts and to advise on standards and metrics by which to evaluate their success.

WHAT SET OF STRATEGIES AND OUTCOMES SHOULD COMMUNITIES WORK TOWARD TO BECOME WELCOMING?

Welcoming communities focus on strategies that engage both immigrants and receiving communities. Welcoming America and its partners have identified five strategy areas for fostering immigrant integration. These include:

1. Leadership and Communications

Local leaders from civic, nonprofit, faith, and private sector work together to spearhead efforts to create and implement comprehensive welcoming plans that advance immigrant-friendly policies, programs, and practices and institutionalize these efforts within institutions by engaging the leadership of diverse residents. Leaders also celebrate the contributions of immigrants and receiving communities through positive communications.

2. Equitable Access to Services

Welcoming communities ensure that immigrant residents have access to the wide array of opportunities in the community by reducing barriers to services and encouraging participation.

3. **Economic Opportunity and Education**

Communities harness the full potential of all residents, ensuring that newcomers have the skills, assets, and education to thrive and that workforce, education, and economic development systems are prepared to better serve and leverage the talents of all residents.

4. **Civic Engagement**

Communities ensure that newcomers fully participate in civic life, including increasing access to leadership, citizenship, and civic participation.

5. **Safe and Connected Communities**

Welcoming communities foster trust and build relationships between immigrants and receiving communities, as well as focus on building connections with specific institutions and communities, such as local law enforcement.

For more examples of promising policies and practices for each strategy area, the Welcoming Cities and Counties Framework and community library are resources available for Welcoming America members.

JOIN US

Are you a Welcoming America member? Your local government may want to join Welcoming America's network and connect with other local governments sharing promising practices with each other and receiving recognition for their work. Get access to online tools, participate in virtual and in-person peer learning exchanges, and qualify for virtual and in-person training. Visit www.welcomingamerica.org/become-a-member to learn more about the membership commitments and how to sign up.