# Standing Up for Welcoming

## Four practical actions for local leaders

To help local leaders prepare for uncertain and rapidly changing state and federal landscapes, we've outlined four practical actions. These steps will help counter fear and division, respond to attacks against immigrants in your community, and build the infrastructure to support and engage immigrant and non-immigrant residents in the long-term. The goal is to ensure that we all belong, contribute, and thrive in our communities.

The wisdom, examples, and resources highlighted below draw on Welcoming America's partners and local members. The strong leadership across the U.S., and support of global partners, gives us hope and inspires us. If you would like to join the Welcoming Network or otherwise get involved, you can email us at membership@welcomingamerica.org.

***What is a welcoming community?***

*A welcoming community is one in which everyone thrives, belongs, and prospers. It features policies and practices to reduce barriers and enable participation for all residents, including immigrants. It builds a positive culture that embraces diversity and fosters positive social and economic benefits that residents can count on and feel. Welcoming communities depend on individuals, institutions, and systems that are inclusive. The Welcoming Standard sets out the policies, programs, and processes that define a welcoming community.*

## Table of contents

1. Set Shared Values to Guide Local Decision-Making
2. Convene a Multisector Welcoming Network
3. Create a Fund to Finance Local Response
4. Inspire Local Support
*About Welcoming America*

# 1. Set Shared Values to Guide Local Decision-Making

Proactively identifying and aligning around core local values can help localities navigate a complex and changing immigration policy environment by guiding local response and decision-making. The values you select should reflect what is important to your community as a whole and should be universally relevant – for example, keeping all residents safe, prosperity for all, and a welcoming environment for new and longtime neighbors alike.

## Resources for Defining Values

There are a wide range of approaches to defining community values. Ideally, the process allows for diverse residents to weigh in. Consider using existing meetings, surveys, advisory boards, or events to collect feedback. Partner organizations and institutions, along with artists, can support you in collecting community feedback and defining values.

## Sample values

- **Resiliency and Growth:** We celebrate our city's many resources, and we see our strength as our people and the different backgrounds and perspectives they bring. We believe in economic growth that leverages our diversity. By capitalizing on all talents, we help our communities withstand acute shocks and chronic stressors. We embrace and celebrate the resiliency of individual community members and of our community as a whole. We empower people and provide the support systems for them to be full participants in the community and the economy. [COMMUNITY] strives to be a place where all can thrive.

- **Diversity and Inclusion:** We believe the cultures and experiences of our city's residents make us more vibrant and creative. We also recognize our nation and our city have struggled with a divisive history. Advancing diversity and inclusion in [COMMUNITY] requires a commitment on the part of all of us. It's not enough to invite people to the table, we need to advance inclusive policies and programs at all levels. We are committed to looking for and recognizing everyone's contributions and investing in all of our people. We want today's generation and future generations to learn what it means to adopt a culture of welcoming.

- **Opportunity**: In [COMMUNITY], we work to open doors to help everyone achieve their fullest potential and their American Dream. We want to address and eliminate barriers that impede opportunities for international students, refugees, immigrants, and long-term members of our communities.  We are dedicated to ensuring peoples' skills are fully

utilized, improving our residents' quality of life, and showcasing their strengths. Ensuring the long-term success of all community members is our goal.

- **Connection and Cohesion:** We recognize that together we are stronger. We all want to feel a sense of belonging, and we need trusted relationships, support, and resources to feel connected to each other. We are all in the human experience together, and we have more in common, even across our differences. To foster community cohesion, we create safe spaces to bring us together to develop meaningful relationships and listen more than we speak. No one succeeds in isolation, and together we can solve tough problems through collaboration and creative problem-solving. We can see each other as good neighbors. We are so much better together.

- **Safety and Stability:** In [COMMUNITY], we believe stability is the foundation for a thriving community. When people feel safe and secure—economically, socially, and emotionally—they can build fulfilling lives and contribute fully. By reducing uncertainty and strengthening the systems people depend on, we create a community where everyone can plan for the future and feel a true sense of belonging.

# 2. Convene a Multisector Welcoming Network

Responding to complexity and uncertainty is made easier through strong, trusting relationships among community leaders and institutions. Local multisector welcoming networks can connect individuals and organizations — including local government, community groups, and businesses — that oversee different types of community resources and can respond to urgent needs in a coordinated, effective way. For example, a network can bring together schools, mental health services, and immigration lawyers who can then coordinate resources for students concerned about the safety of their parents.

Multisector networks should reflect the demographics of the community and include both immigrant and non-immigrant residents, and both immigrant-serving organizations and institutions with a broader mandate – such as schools, chambers, libraries, faith institutions, major employers, and healthcare providers.

Developing a multisector network is an investment for the future, as this group can evolve to support long-term needs and opportunities.

## Questions to Consider When Convening Multisector Networks

- Which leaders and organizations in the community — including local government, police, community institutions, and businesses — can **provide resources** relevant to rapid response?
- Which organizations or individuals are **trusted leaders** in local immigrant communities? Non-immigrant communities? The business community?

- What do network meetings require in order to **facilitate the participation** of these individuals and organizations? Strategies may include adjusting the time or location of the meeting, providing language interpretation, translating materials, providing compensation for time and effort, using new meeting formats, or other activities to ensure the group itself is inclusive and welcoming.
- Which organization will **convene the multisector network** and what support can this group provide? Effective convening organizations are trusted and influential across sectors. Local government, a well-established community-based organization, or a community foundation may be an effective convener. It is also important for the convening organization to be able to commit staff time to the logistics of gathering and facilitating the multisector network.
- Who can **fund the multisector network** in the short and long term, if needed? Networks require staffing, especially as they grow and become more established. Consider local funding streams that can support the convening organization and the network's activities.
- Do cross-sector networks or networks **already exist** in the locality that could add this issue to their mission or mandate?
- Are there existing networks or networks that could **share contacts and support** with this work?
- Is there **potential for opposition** toward efforts to create a welcoming community in the locality? If so, how might the multisector network mitigate the possibility of opposition and respond if it occurs?

## Priority Areas for Multisector Networks

The following list highlights some of the issue areas the local multisector network should consider as it identifies needs, priorities, and opportunities for supporting immigrant residents and investing in welcoming values. These issues can also help guide what organizations and leaders need to be included in the multisector network.


➔ Countering Fear and Misinformation
➔ Investing in Public Safety
➔ Nonprofit Capacity
➔ Volunteers and Resources
➔ Welcoming Infrastructure


### Countering Fear and Misinformation

One of the objectives of federal immigration policy is to create an atmosphere of insecurity and fear in local communities. This is not only felt by people implicated directly by immigration policy, but also by family and community members, employers, social service organizations, and others. Trusted, reliable, and language-accessible channels of information are critical, and communications should focus on key details without reinforcing fear or refuting disinformation.

Multisector networks must develop strategies for getting accurate and timely information to immigrant residents through trusted communicators. Many places can draw from their experience with COVID-19 communications to implement this strategy.

If your community is newer to welcoming work, you will want to start by understanding the demographics of your community. Schools often have good information on who is living in the community and the languages they speak. Immigrant- and refugee-serving organizations should also be key resources.

When thinking about communications be sure to consider different methods of communication — ranging from printed flyers to social media to door knocking — that will best reach the target audience, as well as the language(s) of your target audience. Immigrant-serving organizations, faith institutions, schools, and local leaders can be important partners in communications efforts. In the long term, communities may want to invest in Natural Helpers programs to counter disinformation and to build trust with immigrant residents.

## Investing in Public Safety

The Trump administration has proposed and implemented a number of policies and enforcement initiatives targeting people without access to legal status or with temporary forms of status such as humanitarian parole and Temporary Protected Status. Since many families include a range of immigration status types, these efforts break apart families and communities, reduce safety and productivity, and erode trust in local law enforcement. Multisector networks can play a role in supporting public safety for the community at large including undocumented residents and mixed-status families.

### Policing and Local Law Enforcement Leadership

If possible, the multisector network should include local law enforcement. Building and maintaining relationships between police and all residents, including immigrants is an important aspect of a welcoming community. Policies that clarify the separate roles of local law enforcement and immigration enforcement offer one tool to strengthen relationships.

The multisector network may also want to communicate why welcoming is good for public safety. The Law Enforcement Immigration Task Force and Police Executive Research Forum offer resources that support messaging, communications, and relationship-building between immigrant residents and local law enforcement.

### Raids and Other Enforcement Activities

Multisector networks can play an important role in preparing undocumented residents and mixed-status families for the possibility of an encounter with immigration enforcement or the detention of a family member. Multisector networks may also want to create a workplace raid response plan if there is a large factory or agricultural employer in the area.

Many organizations have developed resources for this type of individual and community emergency preparedness that can help multisector networks identify the next steps. A few are linked below. These include individual planning materials and templates – such as Know Your Rights cards and flyers – that can be easily distributed.

For governments, employers, and community groups:

- CLINIC's Rapid Response Toolkit (under "Click to Download Resources")
- Center for Rural Affairs Tip Sheet on Responding to Immigration Raids in Rural Communities
- National Employment Law Project & National Immigration Law Center Employer Guide
- Reimagining Migration's Emergency Response Guide for Educators

For individuals:

- Immigrant Legal Resource Center Preparedness Plan (preparedness checklist for immigrant individuals)
- National Immigration Project U.S. Citizen Kids and ICE Check-ins: How to Prepare
- National Immigration Project My Community Member was Arrested by ICE, What do I do?

### Changing Policy on Immigration Status

The Trump administration has ended or significantly limit certain immigration categories including Temporary Protected Status for individuals from several countries. The sudden loss of status and work authorization will have immediate and substantial consequences for those local residents impacted. Multisector networks may want to do some scenario planning to understand and plan for the effects of such actions locally.

### Legal Services

Local multisector response networks should support migrants with legal services to ensure eligible individuals access pathways to legal status, government services, and work authorization. Immigration lawyers and immigration legal organizations are important members to include in the multisector network.

## Welcoming Infrastructure

The most important thing a community can do to support local immigrant residents at this moment is to continue to invest in the policies and programs that make a city a welcoming one for all residents, including immigrants. The multisector network can support communities in both rapid response and long-term welcoming work. Consider identifying a few important areas of work for your community using the Welcoming Standard.

# 3. Create a Fund to Finance Local Response

Communities should consider creating a fund to raise and distribute monetary resources to support the priorities discussed in Section 2.

The fund can be established at local philanthropies that have the ability to accept donations from individuals, private businesses, and charitable foundations. In many places, this will mean establishing the fund at a community foundation.

## Checklist for Establishing a Response Fund

- ☐ What is the purpose of your response fund? Your fund's purpose should be developed in consultation with immigrant residents and immigrant-serving organizations. Being as specific as possible about the fund's purpose will help both with fundraising and making decisions about which grant proposals to fund.
- ☐ How will you involve immigrants in your grant-making decisions? What changes might the foundation hosting the fund need to make in its usual grant-making process? This may include establishing a community advisory board for fund grants, changing meeting times to ensure immigrants can participate in the process, or translating requests for proposals.
- ☐ How will you engage local residents and organizations — including businesses, faith institutions, and others — in fundraising for, and donating to, your fund? Successful tactics might include events at local businesses, crowdfunding, a corporate giving circle, faith-based fundraisers, and more.

## Response Fund Case Studies:

- The St. Louis Welcome Fund in St. Louis, USA: In 2021, St. Louis organizations welcomed over 500 people from Afghanistan in just a few months, in addition to ongoing support to other immigrant populations. To respond to resettlement needs, philanthropies partnered to establish the St. Louis Welcome Fund. Hosted by the St. Louis Community Foundation, the Welcome Fund supported a coordinated community response and filled gaps in funding as service providers adjusted to rapidly evolving circumstances.
- The People's Panel in the Peel Region of Ontario, Canada: In 2021, the Tamarack Institute for Community Engagement — funded by the World Education Services Mariam Assefa Fund — designed and launched a participatory grant-making opportunity in Peel. The People's Panel brought together 12 community residents who met weekly to discuss pressing issues within the Peel newcomer community and design a responsive grant opportunity.

# 4. Inspire Local Support

It is critical at this moment to reinforce the shared value of welcoming.

Focus your messaging on how neighbors, residents, and business owners who migrated to the city are vital contributors alongside people who already lived there, and how welcoming benefits everyone. In these communications, lead with shared local values (see section 1) and affirm the importance of these values as applying to everyone;  how and why targeted efforts are needed; and what residents can do to take action. You can also point to the solutions and activities of the multisector network. Knowing that there is a plan in place helps calm concerns and counteract zero-sum “crisis” thinking.

Engage spokespeople who are racially and ethnically diverse, including individuals who come from immigrant and non-immigrant backgrounds. Consider asking trusted community leaders to share messages of welcome. Faith leaders, elected officials, business owners, school representatives, and others have the power to reach many residents who trust them. These leaders can adapt messages to speak to values, explain how they are supporting welcoming, and invite participation.

Multisector networks can also ensure that local leaders are hearing from those who support welcoming at the same volume as those questioning welcoming efforts. Consider collecting notes of support to share with elected officials.

## Ideas to Inspire Local Support

- **Share stories of immigrant and non-immigrant residents working together** on a common project. For example, feature two faith leaders or artists who have developed a friendship and are collaborating on an event. Local media outlets are great places to publish these stories.

- **Make statements of welcome.** Encourage trusted local leaders to share statements of welcome in their public-facing materials, such as newsletters, and reference concrete actions taken to welcome immigrants. This may be part of the commitment made by members of your local multisector network.

- **Bring immigrants and non-immigrants together**. Multisector networks will want to consider taking part in Welcoming Week in September but also may want to host other events that bring immigrant and non-immigrant residents together around the value of welcoming. The Welcoming Week website offers tools to get you started on these types of events year-round.

## Crafting Talking Points

One tool to create values-based messages is the Opportunity Agenda's Value, Problem, Solution, Action (VPSA) framing technique. Below is an example of how this technique is used to respond to a local enforcement action.

### Value: Reinforce your community's commitment to welcoming newcomers.

- [COMMUNITY] has benefitted because we support a great quality of life for everyone. That includes making sure that our neighbors who have chosen [COMMUNITY] can put down roots here. Together, we're making sure neighbors are working together to solve problems, we have a vibrant downtown, the next generation of young people know they belong here, our workforce needs are met, our school enrollments are up, our downtown business community is thriving, [offer other concrete examples of the ways your community has benefited from immigration].
- We reaffirm our commitment to welcoming. We recognize the many ways that all residents of [COMMUNITY] enrich our culture, strengthen our neighborhoods, and contribute to our local economy, whether we've just arrived or been here for generations.

### Problem: Current federal actions don't address our shared challenges.

- [XYZ action] is fear-based, divisive, and dangerous.
- We all deserve to live in a community where we feel safe. These policies will divide our communities and separate families. They do not make us safer or stronger. They divert valuable resources and energy away from real issues that matter in our communities: education, workforce development, health, and [add other local priorities].

### Solution: Confirm your community's plans/preparation to foster unity.

- Our shared identity as residents of this community is far more powerful than any attempts to divide us.
- As a city, we believe in building shared solutions that bring people together instead of letting fear and misinformation divide us. [Cite past programs and plans to foster welcoming in your community.]

### Action: Give your audience a concrete next step.

- We invite community members to get involved in local initiatives that advance welcoming and inclusion.
- We hope you'll let our local elected officials know that a welcoming environment for everyone is an important priority
- Whether it's through volunteering with immigrant support services, participating in community forums, or working with local government on key issues, [list specific local programs if available], there are plenty of ways to contribute positively to the future of our city.

# About Welcoming America

Founded in 2009, Welcoming America is a nonprofit leading a movement of inclusive communities becoming more prosperous by ensuring everyone belongs, including immigrants. Through the Welcoming Network of more than 300 local governments and nonprofits, we work to help communities develop the roadmap they need to create welcoming policies and share new approaches to inclusion to create an environment where everyone can truly thrive. Learn more about Welcoming America.

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Have comments, questions, or additional resources you'd like to share? Please send them to proposals@welcomingamerica.org.