Best Practices in Information Collection and Dissemination for Immigrant-Serving Organizations

National Center for Children in Poverty

Central American Refugee Center (CARECEN) Year 3 Report

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Introduction

This report is the final of three over three years that describes the social and economic needs of low-income immigrants in Suffolk and Nassau Counties, New York, commonly referred to as Long Island. This work was supported by a grant from the New York State Office of New Americans (ONA) Community Navigator Program, through a subcontract to the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) from the Central American Refugee Center (CARECEN). The first report used American Community Survey (ACS) data from the U.S. Census Bureau to examine the characteristics of and hardships faced by low-income immigrants on Long Island. The second report used qualitative data collected through a series of roundtable discussions with community leaders and service providers who work with low-income immigrant communities in towns across Long Island. This third and final report synthesizes findings about information sharing and dissemination of resources among low-income immigrants in Long Island.

For this report, we define "immigrants" as individuals who were not born in the United States. Non-citizen immigrants include both immigrants with legal status (such as green card holders, DACA recipients, and residents with student visas) and undocumented immigrants.

Purpose of Year 3 Report

While our initial proposal in 2017 planned to analyze client data in year 3, NCCP and CARECEN jointly decided to pivot this year's report to focus on best practices in information sharing and dissemination among immigrant-serving organizations. This change stems directly from information gathered in the community roundtable discussions in year 2. While participants discussed a range of resources and services during the roundtables, they expressed that knowledge about these resources was not widespread among immigrants and other immigrant-serving organizations. They also expressed a desire for more coordinated efforts to serve immigrants, with one concrete solution being a comprehensive resource list for Long Island immigrants. At the same time, participants voiced concerns that sharing resources widely might inadvertently provide immigration enforcement authorities with information that could be used to target immigrant communities.

The first part of this report provides best practices and recommendations for how immigrant-serving organizations can protect client information. The second half of the report outlines NCCP's methods for compiling a Long Island resource list for immigrants and recommendations for future updates and secure dissemination of the resource.

Summary of Findings from Years 1 and 2

YEAR 1

Outside of New York City, Long Island has the fastest growing immigrant population in New York State, with a net increase in the immigrant population of 50,000 between 2010 and 2015.[1] The top sending countries to Long Island include El Salvador, India, Dominican Republic, China, Italy, Haiti, Jamaica, Ecuador, and Colombia.[2] The Pew Research Center estimated that 1 in 6 immigrants on Long Island is undocumented.[3]

Analyses of 2012–2016 ACS data conducted for the first-year research report show that non-citizen immigrants make up 10 percent of the population of Nassau County, while naturalized citizens make up 17 percent. The incomes of non-citizen immigrants are lower than other groups. Non-citizen immigrants have lower education levels and are less likely to speak English well, compared to naturalized and U.S.-born citizens, thereby limiting higher-paid employment opportunities. However, non-citizen immigrants are more likely to be employed than both naturalized and U.S-born citizens. Over 90 percent of non-citizen immigrants in both counties have lived in the United States for at least five years.

Low-income (defined as income less than 125 percent of poverty, which in 2016 was $30,424 for a family of 4)[4], non-citizen immigrants face a range of hardships related to their lack of financial security. They experience high housing cost burdens, energy cost burdens, and lower likelihood of having health insurance. Although low-income immigrants face these hardships at much higher levels than those who are higher-income, close to one in three of all non-citizen immigrants spends at least one-third of their income on housing and have no health insurance. Immigrants' restricted eligibility for public benefits, such as Medicaid, may exacerbate these hardships.

YEAR 2

The Year 2 report summarized findings from qualitative analyses of conversations with CARECEN staff and minutes from a series of roundtable discussions held across Long Island, attended by key community leaders and service providers who work closely with immigrants. The report identified several issues preventing community integration namely, widespread fear and distrust between immigrant and non-immigrant residents. The report also identified the recent increase in immigration enforcement and a lack of resources and infrastructure to support all residents as additional barriers to community integration. The report described current services provided to immigrants in Nassau and Suffolk counties that address these barriers and identified ways in which the immigrant community could benefit from additional services and funding for those services.

1   DiNapoli, T. (2016). A portrait of immigrants in New York State. New York: Office of New York State Comptroller. Retrieved from https://www.osc.state.ny.us/reports/immigration/immigration_2016.pdf.
2   Office of New Americans. Fact Sheet on Long Island Immigrants. Retrieved from https://www.newamericans.ny.gov/pdf/redc/LongIsland02.pdf.
3   Kallick, D. (2010). Immigration's impact on the Long Island economy. Hofstra University. Retrieved from https://www.hofstra.edu/pdf/academics/colleges/hclas/cld/cld_f10_immigration_impacts.pdf.
4   Poverty thresholds. (2016). Retrieved from https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty-thresholds.html.

Immigrants' Economic Security Hard Hit in Year 3

PUBLIC CHARGE

In February 2020, the public charge rule was implemented, leading to less access to key public benefits. The public charge rule considers receipt of Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, along with other public benefits, in determinations of legal permanent residence (e.g., green card) in the United States. Public charge makes it less likely that immigrants will use these benefits even when eligible and thereby, they are less likely to seek medical treatment and to have access to nutritious foods.[5]

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES

During the course of year 3 of this project, the COVID-19 pandemic drastically altered the nation's public health and economy. As of June 26, 2020, Nassau and Suffolk counties have lost 2,181 and 1,975 residents to COVID-19, respectively, representing the fourth and sixth highest number of deaths by county in the state.[6]

At the time of this report's publication, the pandemic continues to affect immigrants because of their significant representation in industries vital to the COVID-19 response (e.g., health care, agriculture, and manufacturing), as well as in those negatively impacted by the pandemic (nonessential retail, personal services and private households, building services, and accommodation and food services, among others).[7] Moreover, major pandemic response legislation like the Recovery Rebate in the CARES Act, which leaves out tax filers who use an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN), among others, does not adequately meet the health and economic needs of many immigrants.[8] Given that foreign-born workers constituted one of the hardest hit groups during the initial phase of the Great Recession,[9] it is likely that the current downturn will exacerbate economic hardships outlined in the Year 1 Report, and magnify barriers to community integration due to a lack of resources, as found in year 2.

As a result of these challenges, there is a rising need for community non-profits, libraries, and other immigrant-serving organizations whose services provide needed relief. It is unclear, however, how the pandemic will affect these organizations' capacity to sustain their services and meet the increasing needs of their clients. It is likely that some community organizations may no longer be able to function due to a lack of funding or a need to prioritize pandemic-related relief. It is possible that immigrants may face a landscape of high need and fewer services, especially for families with an undocumented immigrant family member. It is also likely that the list of Long Island resources shared with CARECEN and compiled prior to March 2020 will be outdated and will need revisiting due to a reprioritization of services and closures of public buildings, such as libraries. The current public health crisis also underscores the need for organizations to learn about and employ safe digital security practices as more supportive services and programming move online.

5   Changes to "public charge" inadmissibility rule: Implications for health and health coverage. (19 Aug 2019). Kaiser Family Foundation. Retrieved from https://www.kff.org/disparities-policy/fact-sheet/public-charge-policies-for-immigrants-implications-for-health-coverage/

6   New York State Department of Health. Fatalities by county. Retrieved from https://covid19tracker.health.ny.gov/views/NYS-COVID19-Tracker/NYSDOHCOVID-19Tracker-Fatalities?%3Aembed=yes&%3Atoolbar=no&%3Atabs=n.

7   Gelatt, J. (March 2020). Immigrant workers: Vital to the U.S. COVID-19 response, disproportionately vulnerable. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute. Retrieved from https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/immigrant-workers-us-covid-19-response.

8   National Immigration Law Center. (May 2020). Understanding the impact of key provisions of COVID-19 relief bills on Immigrant communities." Retrieved from https://www.nilc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COVID19-relief-bills-understanding-key-provisions.pdf.

9   Enchautegui, M.E. (2012). Hit hard but bouncing back: The employment of immigrants during the Great Recession and the recovery." Washington, DC: Urban Institute. Retrieved from https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/26181/412691-Hit-Hard-but-Bouncing-Back-The-Employment-of-Immigrants-During-the-Great-Recession-and-the-Recovery.PDF.

The Importance of Protecting Immigrants' Information

Increased immigration enforcement in recent years and growing anti-immigrant sentiment has led to what many researchers refer to as "a chilling effect" among immigrants. This phrase is used to characterize the decrease in immigrants seeking and utilizing those public benefits and other services for which they are eligible, if their identifiable information is collected. It is due to a fear that the information will be used to deport them or their loved ones. A study conducted in 2017 found that early care and education programs experienced drops in enrollment, attendance, and parent participation, and increased the difficulty of connecting families to health, nutrition, and social services, which was likely due to changing immigration policy and increased immigration enforcement.[10] Indeed, one roundtable participant in 2019 admitted that they took down programming information from their website due to fear that immigration enforcement authorities would arrive at their events to detain undocumented immigrants in attendance. Organizations must take precautions when collecting, storing, and sharing identifiable information about their immigrant clients. Doing so and reassuring immigrant clients about the security of their information will encourage and allow families to better access the services they need.

BEST PRACTICES FOR IMMIGRANT-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS TO PROTECT CLIENT INFORMATION

The list below grew out of conversations with immigrant-serving organizations, Internet research, and a digital security training by Equality Labs, a South Asian technology organization that employs multiple strategies for combating violence, discrimination, and intolerance, including digital security trainings and best practices (see Appendix III for more information about Equality Labs).

1. Only collect client information necessary for providing services and programming.

2. Refrain, whenever possible, from collecting and storing identifiable data about clients. This includes citizenship status, full name, home address, names and ages of family members, and place of work.

3. If it is necessary to collect and store identifiable data about clients, provide access to only a select few staff members and follow digital security protocols. This could mean storing this data on a password-protected, encrypted drive and ensuring that this data are regularly erased when no longer needed.

4. Implement a "safe space" policy—a set of protocols to protect the privacy and safety of the families you serve—for your organization and communicate the policy to all staff and clients. See CLASP's A Guide to Creating "Safe Space" Policies for Early Childhood Programs.

5. Enhancing organizational digital security takes money, time, and expertise. Consider applying for grants to invest in digital security trainings for staff and to upgrade organizational software and data systems. See Appendix III for resources on organizations that offer digital security trainings and consultations.

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10   Matthews, H., Ullrich, R., & Cervantes, W. (2018). Immigration policy's harmful impacts on early care and education. Washington, DC: CLASP. Retrieved from https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2018/03/2018_harmfulimpactsece.pdf.

Creating a Comprehensive Resource List for Long Island Immigrants

METHODS

As mentioned earlier, community stakeholders at roundtables expressed the need for a comprehensive list of resources for immigrants in Long Island. In response, NCCP staff compiled a list of organizations that serve immigrants in Long Island (Appendix I [not public]). The final list is a combination of a list provided by CARECEN, initially compiled in April 2018, resources and services mentioned in minutes from community roundtable discussions, and organizations listed in A Guide to Community-Based Organizations for Immigrants from the New York State Education Department's Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages. The resource list was cross-checked with information available on each organization's website. Additional guides to resources for immigrants in Long Island are listed in Appendix III.

NCCP's recommendations for updating and disseminating the list grew out of analyses of roundtable minutes, Internet research, a conversation with the Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages at New York State Education Department, and ongoing consultations with CARECEN staff (please note that OBEWL did not approve or in any way endorse this report's statements and findings). These recommendations also attempt to address the following challenges: (1) ensuring that the information within resource lists is up to date and accurate, and (2) that resource lists are not used by immigration enforcement authorities to target sites that provide vital services to immigrants. Additional notes are included for resource-limited organizations for compiling a resource list. As always, organizations also should follow best practices to protect client and organizational information.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMPILING AN UP-TO-DATE RESOURCE LIST

1. Utilize online secure surveys (like Qualtrics) to collect information from organizations on a quarterly to yearly basis. Unfortunately, organizations must have a paid account to utilize Qualtrics. See note below for how resource-limited organizations can adapt this method. Limit access to the responses.

   a. Survey should have clear, accessible language and wording.
   b. Survey should minimize open-ended responses and provide clear, multiple choice/drop down options instead.
   c. Ensure that text entered into the system is in standardized formats. For example, telephone numbers should have only 10 digits, no extra numbers. Ideally, addresses should auto-populate so that the addresses are standardized and aligned with post office addresses (to ensure that there are no mistakes).
   d. Survey should ask for contact information for the person completing the form. See additional suggestions in Appendix II: Sample Survey Fields and Format Options.

      NOTE: For resource-limited organizations, use Google Forms or Survey Monkey and ensure that IP addresses of respondents are not collected.

2. Allow members of the immigrant community (as opposed to organizations) to anonymously contribute to the resource list by distributing a public survey link via an online website form, Qualtrics, or Google Forms. Make sure that IP addresses are not collected when people submit their answers to the survey/form.

3. Once you collect information from organizations, call to clarify and confirm organizational information with the contact person.

NOTE: This step may not be possible for resource-limited organizations, and if not, then the final list should have a note to users telling them that information may not be up-to-date and they should confirm directly with the organization before arriving for services or programs.

4. The final resource list should be available in several formats, including as a .jpg or .png file to enable easy sharing via phone, as suggested by a roundtable participant. While the current list is in Excel format, we do not recommend disseminating the list to clients in this format. Excel spreadsheets, however, would allow one to sort by service types or location and may be helpful to organizations to better refer clients to resources that fit their needs.

5. Avoid technical language.

6. Accompany the list with pictures or icons (See A Guide to Community-Based Organizations for Immigrants produced by the New York State Education Department's Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages as an example).[11]

7. Consider color-coding based on the type of services offered (e.g., legal, food assistance, etc.).

8. Have printed copies available, as well as an online version.

9. Include date of update on all paper copies and digital versions.

10. Include all types of services in the resource list, including know-your-rights trainings and services provided by libraries.

11. Convene a formal or informal small group to review the list prior to distributing widely.[12] The group should consider different ways of organizing information, such as by organization, geographic location, or service types and determine what would be most useful to immigrant clients.

    NOTE: For resource-limited organizations, this conversation may be incorporated into existing check-ins or meetings across immigrant-serving organizations.

12. The final resource should be available in several languages.[13] For Long Island, we recommend producing the resource guide in the top five spoken languages of the clients served by immigrant-serving organizations. Consider including a calendar of events as a separate resource (e.g., wellness fairs), using surveys to crowdsource the information.

    NOTE: For resource-limited organizations, consider translation of the resource into the language(s) spoken by the majority of immigrant clients.

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11   The resources guides produced by the New York State Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages modeled much of their format on Joan P. Nassivera's 2004 book, The New York Times Guide for Immigrants to New York City.

12   The following organizations offered to assist with review of the resource list during roundtable discussions: Hempstead Hispanic Civic Association, CARECEN, and HRH Care.

13   The resource guide produced by the New York State Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages translated their resource guides into the top 10 languages spoken in the state.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISSEMINATION OF THE RESOURCE LIST

1. At this time, we do not recommend keeping an online copy (e.g., on a website or a shared folder on Google Drive) of the resource list without the expressed consent of each of the organizations listed due to concerns expressed during roundtable discussions.

2. Organizations can share printed copies with clients when they attend events, classes, or obtain services.

3. CARECEN can share the resource list via email with trusted stakeholders and organizations.[14]

4. Immigrant-serving organizations can distribute the resource list in the following venues, as suggested by stakeholders at community roundtables: shelters (especially in the winter), churches (especially those that provide community services like English classes or food pantries), libraries, and other community "hang out spots," including local businesses.

5. Text the resource list using Signal rather than Whatsapp or Facebook messenger.[15, 16 17]

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14   Literacy Suffolk offered to disseminate the resource list through their network of tutors during a roundtable discussion.
15   Fang, L. (2018 Mar 26). ICE used private Facebook data to find and track criminal suspect, internal emails show. The Intercept. Retrieved on June 20, 2020 from https://theintercept.com/2018/03/26/facebook-data-ice-immigration/.
16   Orphanides, K.G., (16 Apr 2020). Why everyone should be using Signal instead of Whatsapp. Wired. Retrieved on June 20, 2020 from from https://www.wired.co.uk/article/signal-vs-whatsapp.
17   June 1, 2020 Digital Security Training conducted by Equality Labs.

APPENDIX II: Sample Survey Fields and Format Options for Collecting Comprehensive Information About Immigrant Services and Programs

1. Organization's name, addresses of organization, and phone numbers

    a. Name—open ended
    b. Street Address, City, State, Zip Code – Should auto-populate so that the addresses are standardized and aligned with post office addresses, to ensure that there are no mistakes
    c. Counties served—multiple choice, allowed to select more than one
    d. Telephone—Allow only numbers to be entered for this field, and only 10 digits to minimize typos
    e. Open days and hours for main office (multiple choice/drop-down)
    f. Website
    g. Facebook page
    h. Twitter handle
    i. Instagram account
    j. Organizational email address for client - only allow entry in proper format
    k. Other mode of communication

2. Contact person for directory (not published) – open-ended but with formatting restrictions

    a. Name—open ended
    b. Title—open ended
    c. Telephone – Allow only numbers to be entered for this field, and only 10 digits to minimize typos
    d. Email—only allow entry in proper format
    e. Preferred method of communication: multiple choice, allow to select more than one.

3. Services provided—multiple choice, allow to select more than one

    a. Be specific with the multiple-choice options. Potential categories include job training programs, English classes, tutoring (for what ages and subjects), parenting classes, food pantries/bank, legal aid for immigration, legal assistance with public benefits, etc.
    b. Also include an open-ended response here that appears only after they have chosen a category.
    c. Open days and hours for each service—multiple choice/drop-down

4. Languages spoken—multiple choice, allow to select more than one with open-ended response shown if "Other" is chosen.

5. Accessible by public transit? Yes/No

    a. If yes, an open-ended response form should appear indicating respondents to enter bus routes and train stops close to their location.
    b. If no, ask "Is parking available?" with yes/no response selections and "Is transportation offered?" with yes/no/sometimes, call ahead response selections.

APPENDIX III: Additional Resources for Immigrants in Long Island and for Organizational Digital Security

OTHER NEW YORK- AND LONG ISLAND-RELATED RESOURCES GUIDES AND LISTS

1. A Guide to Community-Based Organizations for Immigrants, 2019.

   NYSED developed this resource for immigrants between summer of 2018 to June 2019 in close partnership with their eight Regional Bilingual Education Resources Networks across the state, including one in Long Island for the Long Island resource guide. They contacted each organization to ensure the information contained was accurate (phone conversation with the Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages, NYSED, 3 Dec 2019). This resource is in alphabetical order and contains symbols indicating whether the organization provides the following services: advocacy and community engagement, legal services, health care, public assistance, housing, safety, labor and employment, and/or youth and education. These resources are included in the master resource list compiled for CARECEN. Available at http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/bilingual-ed/long-island-cbo-list-v7-a.pdf. Other languages and regions available at http://www.nysed.gov/bilingual-ed/guide-community-based-organizations-immigrants.

2. Suffolk Community Resources to Assist Undocumented Immigrants, 2018.

   The Health and Welfare Council of Long Island and Long Island Wins compiled this resource guide for their immigrant constituents. The Welfare to Work Commission of the Suffolk County Legislature also contributed Suffolk County agency resources. The resource is in alphabetical order and labeled with "agency supportive services codes" indicating whether the organization provides health, food and nutrition services, family support, educational services, and/or legal supports. These resources are not included in the master resource list compiled for CARECEN. Available at https://www.scnylegislature.us/DocumentCenter/View/60553/2018-Suffolk-Community-Resources-to-Assist-Undocumented-Immigrants-PDF.

3. 2-1-1 Long Island

   This resource is for all Long Island residents. 2-1-1 Long Island connects people to local health and human service agencies and programs. Nassau and Suffolk County residents can call 2-1-1 to connect with a caring call specialist or search the online database, available 24/7. In addition to containing available services in Long Island, the website also contains information pertinent to the general public, such as information about COVID-19 and Census 2020. These resources are not included in the master resource list compiled for CARECEN. The website is available at http://www.211li.org/cms/

4. National Immigration Legal Services Directory

   The Immigration Advocates Network (IAN), a program of Pro Bono Net, works to expand access to immigration legal resources and information. Their website contains a national legal directory that allows users to search for free or low-cost immigration legal services providers by state, county, or detention facility. The directory relies on self-reported information solicited annually from organizations. These resources are not included in the master resource list compiled for CARECEN. Available at https://www.immigrationadvocates.org/nonprofit/legaldirectory/organization.551161-Immigration_Legal_Services_Brentwood_ILSOLI.

DIGITAL SECURITY RESOURCES AND GUIDES FOR ORGANIZATIONS TO PROTECT IMMIGRANT CLIENTS

1. Ulrich, R. (2019). A Guide to Creating "Safe Space" Policies for Early Childhood Programs. Washington DC: CLASP

   A "safe space" policy is made up of protocols that organizations can implement to protect the privacy and safety of the families they serve and designate their facility as a safe space from immigration enforcement authorities. This guide, while written with early childhood programs in mind, can apply to a more diverse set of organizations as well. The guide, targeted at practitioners, advocates, and policymakers, contains information and resources to design and implement "safe space" policies that safeguard early childhood programs against immigration enforcement. The guide includes an overview of "safe space" policies, template for "safe space" policy, and key resources for parents and providers or early childhood programs. Their guide is available at https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/publications/2019/04/2019_safespacesguide.pdf.

2. Equality Labs Digital Security Trainings

   Equality Labs is a South Asian technology organization that employs multiple strategies "dedicated to ending caste apartheid, gender-based violence, Islamophobia, White Supremacy and religious intolerance." These strategies include community organizing, art, research and digital security. Among other programs, they offer digital security trainings to protect networks and organizations, consultations to organizations and individuals at a sliding scale rate and audit and technical support to like-minded organizations. See https://www.equalitylabs.org/digitalsecurity for more information and resources.

3. Constitutional Communications

   Constitutional Communications is a nonprofit organization that specializes in information security for professionals and civil society organizations. They recently engaged nonprofit organizations shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic began in a six-week digital security cohort. Their website at https://constitutionalcommunications.org/ describes more of their activities and contains videos, presentations, and links to other comprehensive web resources about digital security.

4. Digital Security Exchange

   Digital Security Exchange links civil society organizations to digital security providers. They offer organizations help with understanding their risks and identifying their digital security needs. When possible, they connect organizations with experts to help address specific vulnerabilities. Through this exchange, organizations can learn how to store information safely and how to secure communications between staff, volunteers, and clients. Their website is available at https://www.digitalsecurityexchange.org/.

5. Digital Impact

   This initiative, part of the Digital Civil Society Lab at the Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society, aims to help social sector practitioners use digital resources safely, ethically, and effectively. They host in-person and virtual conversations and foster an online community to exchange practical data-related knowledge and expertise. They also have tools, policies, and resources for data governance in the social sector which are available at their website at https://digitalimpact.io/toolkit.

6. Electronic Frontier Foundation's Surveillance Self-Defense materials

   Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) is an independent nonprofit and has publicly available tips, tool guides, and resources on online surveillance and information about secure applications and software. This resource is directed mostly at individual digital security. See their resources and tips at https://ssd.eff.org/.