



## OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALIGNMENT AND ENGAGEMENT WITH THE IMMIGRANT RIGHTS AGENDA IN CALIFORNIA

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Since the 1996 anti-immigrant laws galvanized the immigrant rights movement in California, we have set a record of unprecedented legislative accomplishments to expand the safety net and remove barriers to equity and inclusion on behalf of immigrants. Some of these accomplishments include the TRUST Act, the Driver's License bill, The CA DREAM Act, AB 540, the E-Verify bill that protect immigrant workers, Comprehensive Medical for Undocumented Children, and the One California Initiative which provides funding for naturalization service and citizenship programs; advocacy preserving state-funded health and public benefits for immigrant communities; and protecting immigrant communities in healthcare reform implementation. All of these laws create a powerful platform for our state and its advocates to make genuine immigrant integration a reality for all immigrants. (*See CA Blueprint document*)

So what's next, California? Great as these accomplishments are, the work is not yet finished. CIPC and its partners will continue to build on these victories as a roadmap towards creating a state that is a model of immigrant integration and immigrant rights advocacy, and develop a comprehensive policy platform based on immigrant inclusion. Below are a few critical policy areas that might be of interest and alignment with your work, and will help shape immigrant rights advocacy in the state in the years to come:

### **Short-term: (1-3 years)**

- Build the statewide immigrant rights infrastructure by strengthening the capacity of regional coalitions and harnessing their political power.
- The California Campaign for Universal Representation that provides access to legal counsel and due process for immigrants in removal proceedings and keep families together.
- Statewide strategy and administrative advocacy on Workforce Development and Adult Education.
- Budget advocacy on a host of immigrant policy priorities, including health and public benefits.
- State and local campaigns around immigration enforcement reform.
- County level advocacy on Health for All.
- Promoting the California model to other state partners and philanthropic communities.

### **Long-term: (3-8 years)**

- Gender equity in immigrant policy programming.
- Early childhood education for immigrant children. (Policy measures that seek to increase participation in early education should seek ways to decrease the costs for low-income groups while ensuring a common, high level of quality education for all children).
- Mental health of children and adult immigrants.
- Aging immigrant communities, including retirement options for aging populations. (California had the largest number of older immigrants (1.3 million, or 27 percent of the total elderly immigrant population) in 2010, followed by Florida (677,000, or 14 percent), and New York (653,000, or 13 percent). These three states accounted for 54 percent (or 2.7 million) of all older immigrants compared to 45 percent (or 18.1 million) of all immigrants).
- Health and food access issues/intersection between food and poverty.
- A campaign around food stamps.
- Climate refugees and migrants.

## Looking Ahead

All of the issues noted above are critical to the well-being and integration of immigrant communities. In the coming years, more work must be done to advance immigrant rights in California and continue to build a sustainable movement. A few areas for advancement include:

1. *Developing a cohesive and streamlined immigrant rights and immigrant integration agenda.* California has more immigrants than any other state. It is home to more than 10 million immigrants—one in four of the foreign-born population nationwide. Policymakers have often viewed immigrant services such as healthcare, social services and adult education as piecemeal programs that support the poor and vulnerable. CIPC believes that decision makers should examine policy through a holistic lens – immigrants and their families constitute the state’s future, and immigrant integration priorities are important to the well-being of all Californians. There must be a cohesive effort among policy advocates, community organizations, philanthropic institutions and academics to focus policymakers’ attention on immigrant integration and carefully consider how funding decisions, programs and services, and the well being of immigrant communities affect the future of our state.
2. *Advancing robust pro-immigrant policy proposals in California.* As many other states and the federal government veer towards harsh anti-immigrant policies, California, as the largest and most heavily immigrant state in the country, has the opportunity to continue to show there is a different way. We have already laid the groundwork by passing creative pro-immigrant policies in the past five years. The coming years should provide us with greater opportunity to demonstrate true leadership and advance a compelling vision of full integration.
3. *Strengthening the state’s immigrant rights movement.* Our movement is stronger than it has ever been before, with diverse leadership, flourishing regional coalitions and campaigns, and bridges being built across ethnic groups. The next few years presents the opportunity to continue to strengthen this infrastructure to ensure the voices of immigrants themselves are an integral part of policy debates; to create pressure for pro-immigrant federal reforms; and to continue holding state policymakers accountable for upholding and expanding the rights of California’s immigrants.
4. *Changing the public debate.* Public opinion polls have shown that more and more Americans – and a majority of Californians – support immigration reform and welcome our country’s diversity. However, the voices of anti-immigrant activists often overshadow this reality in the media and public debate. Recently, immigrant rights advocates in California have done a phenomenal job in garnering pro-immigrant media coverage of policy proposals, diverse communities and the need for change. We must build upon this work in the coming years to strengthen the political will for real, inclusive, and transformative immigration reform.

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