



Community and Economic Development in North Carolina and Beyond Blog: Building Integrated Communities in North Carolina

By CED Guest Author

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Sejal Zota is the School of Government Immigration Law Specialist.

A growing number of reports from organizations like the National League of Cities and the ICMA demonstrate that communities that help immigrants integrate fully into the mainstream experience gain in economic productivity, public safety, and social cohesion. A variety of strategies can be used to promote immigrant integration, including community dialogues, festivals and celebrations of diversity, translation and interpretation services, language instruction, immigrant representation on governing boards, coordinated outreach efforts, and public and private partnerships.

The National League of Cities recently featured **20 of the most innovative cities** in the area of immigrant integration. Examples of featured programs include Durham, North Carolina's Mayor's Hispanic Latino Initiative and Littleton, Colorado's Immigrant Integration Initiative.

In place for eight years, the **Mayor's Hispanic Latino Initiative** in Durham has helped to reduce crime against immigrants and strengthened relationships between the Hispanic community, city government, and police. Some of the strategies used by the program include increasing levels of police activity in targeted Latino neighborhoods; integrating Latinos into the community by developing neighborhood capacity and breaking down barriers to community services and city employment opportunities; and decreasing potential friction between Latinos and other residents by promoting understanding of cultural differences. Some noteworthy accomplishments include 135 new graduates of the Spanish Language Citizens Police Academy, an increase in Spanish language employees and in Spanish-speaking police officers, and the Spanish language Neighborhood Watch Program.

Since 2003, the Littleton Immigrant Integration Initiative in Colorado has helped to welcome newcomers and improve relationships between native and immigrant residents. The Initiative trains more than 100 community volunteers who work one-on-one with immigrants as they practice for their U.S. citizenship exams. Other strategies include a one-stop information center at the public library where immigrants can learn about city systems and community services and a community health liaison program through which immigrants can learn about available health resources, receive free basic screenings and medical care, and attend wellness workshops.

In line with this work, the School of Government and the Institute for the Study of the Americas at UNC-Chapel Hill are launching a pilot project to help North Carolina city governments successfully engage with immigrants and refugee populations in order to improve public safety, promote economic development, enhance communication, and improve relationships. Through the "**Building Integrated Communities**" program, city governments and diverse community stakeholders will generate locally-relevant strategies to strengthen relationships and outcomes. For more information on this program, contact Sejal Zota at szota@sog.unc.edu.