



IDEAS THAT INNOVATE

State & Local Policies





Resident Leadership Academies

Policy

Providing opportunities for immigrants to learn about city government, navigate services more efficiently, communicate needs, network across ethnic lines, and serve in leadership capacities, resulting in greater community engagement across the immigrant community.

Where it's working

- Nashville, TN
- New York City, NY
- Cupertino, CA; among others

Players

- Local policymakers
- Local government agencies
- Local foundations
- Community based organizations
- Residents

What does it mean?

Communities have long known that stronger neighborhoods depend on more effective delivery of local government services. Local municipal governments are increasingly developing new methods to nurture an understanding of local government and sense of connection to it through leadership opportunities that target both new immigrants and established residents. A number of diverse resident leadership academy models have emerged, each building off of local city strengths. There are many different approaches to take, depending on local resources, partners, and needs.

What is a Resident Leadership Academy?

A resident leadership academy provides resident grassroots leaders with an opportunity to get to know local government, including its policies, processes, and programs. Such academies foster a sense of connection between immigrant participants and local government and typically encourage participants to share what they learn with others from their own community or neighborhood. These hands-on opportunities provide participants with the knowledge, confidence, and connections they need to view government as a resource and partner.

One example of a resident leadership academy is Nashville's **MyCity Academy**. The Academy empowers both immigrants and established residents to fully understand and participate in Nashville's government. Over the course of seven months, MyCity participants meet with leaders across local government departments and tour facilities. This experiential learning allows them to gain a deeper understanding of how government works, how to resolve issues and obtain information, and how to serve as a resource to help others in their ethnic communities understand and access government services. An active alumni network helps keep participants engaged with each other.

The **Neighborhood Leadership Institutes** in New York City provide a second example that targets priority neighborhoods with fast-growing immigrant communities. They offer free skill-building workshops for emerging immigrant leaders, which include navigating city government, community organizing, and fundraising. The goal is to bring residents together to work on issues of concern to the community, building networks of community partners, developing community organizing skills, and increasing knowledge of how government works. Participating groups are invited to apply for micro-grant funds and project planning assistance to undertake a community improvement project upon completion of the program. The Neighborhood Leadership Institutes are a partnership of the New York City's Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, New York Community Trust, and Citizens Committee for New York City.

A third example can be found in the city of Cupertino, California's **Block Leader Program** that was created over a decade ago to enhance emergency preparedness and to help address social cohesion concerns from rapidly changing demographics. Block leaders are identified and receive training and support on city services and processes, as well as training in cultural awareness and communication. To date, almost 350 block leaders, who each coordinate their own block or community and foster connections across residents, have been trained.

Why does it matter?

As communities grow increasingly diverse, forward-thinking local governments must be proactive in connecting to new populations. Helping immigrants and established community members better understand how to navigate local systems, organize themselves to express their concerns, and develop networks among and across ethnic groups will build greater cohesion and has the potential to result in cost savings, such as through decreases in code violation enforcement.

Resources for Action

Links

<http://www.nashville.gov/Mayors-Office/Priorities/New-Americans/MyCity-Academy.aspx> ↗

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/imm/html/initiatives/nli.shtml> ↗

www.cupertino.org/blockleader ↗

Additional Reading

City of Beaverton, Oregon's BOLD program trains immigrant residents on civic participation and connects them with opportunities to serve:

<http://www.beavertonoregon.gov/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/4141> ↗

Margie McHugh, "Immigration Civic Integration and Service Access Initiatives: City-Sized Solutions for City-Sized Needs," Migration Policy Institute, September 2014.

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