



IDEAS THAT INNOVATE

State & Local Policies

Establishing Welcoming Advisory Boards and Working Groups





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Policy

Local advisory boards and/or working groups focused on strategic planning and implementation of efforts to promote immigrant inclusion and the engagement of the receiving community can greatly enhance local governments. Engagement of leaders from the nonprofit, business and immigrant community is useful to inform municipal efforts and actors with implementing policy and programming.

Where it's working

- Dayton, OH
- Pittsburgh, PA
- Allegheny County, PA
- and many other cities and counties across the country

Players

- Local policymakers
- Local government agencies
- Local foundations
- Community-based organizations
- Employers
- Schools
- Libraries
- Health care
- Immigrant leaders

What does it mean?

Understanding to what extent a city or county is welcoming to immigrants and making the most of its local talent requires ongoing input from diverse stakeholders. Each brings a different perspective based on personal experiences and can help local government be responsive to emerging needs and opportunities.

Advisory boards can provide a structure by which to receive invaluable guidance, input, and advice to city agencies. Working groups tend to “roll up their sleeves” and actively work to implement strategic plan priorities in the community.

What is a Welcoming Advisory Body?

A **welcoming advisory body** (whether construed as a commission, board, council, or working group) brings together both immigrants and the broader receiving community to discuss demographic changes in the community and how the city or county can respond and make the most of its diverse talent.

Members provide critical input by sharing an outside perspective that government employees may not typically receive. Members can also serve as ambassadors for municipal efforts back in their own ethnic communities—sharing updates and information, and helping foster a deeper sense of connection. Some advisory bodies become involved in program implementation, helping to make specific city outreach projects a reality.

The **Welcome Dayton Committee** is an example of an advisory board that functions as a working group of public and private sector community partners who provide advice on how the policies and practices of local government and other community institutions can be more welcoming to immigrants and the receiving community. They help elevate the work in the community and help businesses and other organizations learn how they can engage with Welcome Dayton. Their leading charge is to help local organizations consider how they can do “one more thing” to make Dayton more immigrant-friendly.

<http://www.welcomedayton.org/about/committee/> ↗

Welcoming Pittsburgh’s Advisory Council was convened by the Mayor to help establish a plan for a citywide initiative that celebrates the city’s immigrant past and builds a more welcoming future. This 40-member council developed an implementation plan that engages both new and established community members and encourages welcoming practices across local government, business, nonprofits and residents.

<http://pittsburghpa.gov/mayor/release?id=3421> ↗

Allegheny County’s Immigrant and International Advisory Council guides the Department of Human Services on its cultural competency and accessibility to immigrants and internationals. The council is composed of immigrants, refugees and service providers. Many credit the Council with making the region more immigrant-friendly across multiple domains. The lessons learned report from the advisory council is available:

<http://www.alleghenycounty.us/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=37964> ↗

Why does it matter?

Participation in municipal service programs and community social cohesion will likely flounder without meaningful outreach to immigrant communities. Linguistic and cultural differences across diverse populations mean that local governments need a wide array of input into their welcoming strategies if they want to successfully integrate newcomers. Advisory bodies are an efficient way to gather information, test approaches, and begin an ongoing dialogue across ethnic lines and sectors to ensure effectiveness.

Additional Reading

High Point, North Carolina's immigrant advisory committee, a result of their comprehensive planning process Building Integrated Communities:
<http://isa.unc.edu/files/2013/02/BIC-newsletter-summer-2012.pdf> ↗

Charlotte, North Carolina convened a 20-member task force to conduct a listening tour with diverse communities and examine opportunities for access to services and civic engagement with an eye towards immigrant integration:
<http://charmeck.org/city/charlotte/cic/getinvolved/Pages/Immigrant-Integration-Task-Force.aspx> ↗

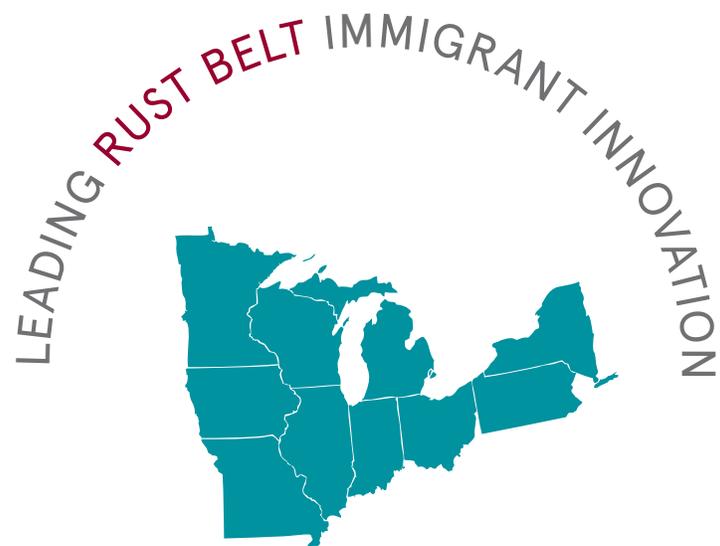
Cincinnati, Ohio has an 80-member task force of volunteers working to advise the mayor on how to make the city more immigrant-friendly:
<http://www.cincinnati-oh.gov/mayor/immigration/> ↗

Contacts

Melissa Bertolo
Welcome Dayton Program Coordinator
City of Dayton Human Relations Council
937-333-1422
melissa.bertolo@daytonohio.gov

Betty Cruz
Manager, Special Initiatives
Office of Mayor William Peduto, City of Pittsburgh
412-255-2439
betty.cruz@pittsburghpa.gov

Barbara Murock
Health Policy Specialist/
Immigrants and Internationals Initiative Manager
Allegheny County Department of Human Services
412-350-5835
Barbara.murock@alleghenycounty.us



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WelcomingEconomiesNetwork@gmail.com

@WENetworkGlobal

facebook.com/WENetwork