EVALUATION *Highlights*

SUPPORTING IMMIGRANT & REFUGEE FAMILIES

A Grantmaking Initiative of The Colorado Trust

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ABSTRACT

Colorado is a 21st century gateway state for immigrants.[1] In 2000, The Colorado Trust (The Trust) developed the Supporting Immigrant and Refugee Families initiative (SIRFI) to strengthen the ability of immigrant-serving organizations to provide mental health and cultural adjustment services to immigrants and refugees. The Trust is a statewide grantmaking foundation dedicated to advancing the health and well-being of the people of Colorado.

As the work of grantees unfolded under this initiative, it became clear that immigrants and refugees needed help to become part of the communities in which they settled. As a result, The Trust next launched its SIRFI immigrant integration initiative in 2004. The first 10 immigrant integration grants (Cycle 1) were awarded in the fall of that year. A second cohort of nine grants (Cycle 2) was awarded one year later. Each grant was for approximately five years, including six months to one year for planning and four years for implementation. Only Cycle 1 grantees participated in the evaluation.

Immigrant integration was defined by The Trust as a "two-way street that involves adaptation on the part of immigrants themselves and on the part of the broader or receiving community. This process allows immigrants to adjust to a new lifestyle without losing their own identity, while the community, including private and public institutions, is welcoming and responsive. Immigrant integration serves to strengthen community cohesion and is beneficial to both sides."

Based on the belief that community members know their needs best, this Trust initiative encouraged grantees to tailor their integration strategies and activities to the unique needs of their communities, as long as they reflected a two-way street process.

This Evaluation Highlights summarizes a few of the critical lessons generated from the evaluation findings for Cycle 1 that may be of interest to funders, community leaders, technical assistance providers and others interested in supporting immigrant integration work. For the full evaluation report, *Integrating Immigrants in Colorado: Accomplishments, Challenges and Lessons Learned,* which includes the grantees' strategies, activities and accomplishments; conditions and factors that affected their work; what was sustained at the end of Cycle 1; and the lessons learned, please visit www.coloradotrust.org.

ABOUT THE TERMS USED IN THIS DOCUMENT

The term ***immigrant*** in this report includes refugees and asylees. Most of the grantee communities did not have large populations of refugees or asylees; one grantee community experienced a growing number of refugees during the grant period. ***Immigrants*** are people born outside of the United States and ***receiving community members*** are U.S.-born persons. Children of U.S. citizens born abroad are not considered immigrants. The distinction between immigrants and receiving community members, however, was not always clear in some of the grantee communities. Perceptions about who is and isn't an immigrant was usually based on the person's race, ethnicity and preferred language, and not where they were born. Such perceptions complicated the dynamics in the grantee communities where second- and third-generation Americans of Mexican ancestry have a strong presence.

CURRENT CONTEXT OF IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION

The ability to effectively support and conduct immigrant integration work is essential. America's communities are changing due to global migration, which in turn is affected by the economic trends in the U.S. and abroad. Despite the efforts of anti-immigrant groups, immigrants continue to come to the U.S. in search of better employment opportunities, to reunite with their families or to seek refuge from persecution. In one of the grantee communities, Littleton, the immigrant population grew by 123% between 1990 and 2000.[2] By 2009, census data showed that their immigrant population had grown by approximately another 48%. In another grantee community, Fort Morgan, Somali and Congolese refugees began to arrive in 2006 and 2007, respectively.[3] The community leaders and members of Littleton and Fort Morgan, like those in many other places across the nation, wanted to understand and learn how to address the impact of this type of change on residents, schools, neighborhoods, the workplace and other settings where immigrants and receiving community members interacted. The lessons from this initiative and its evaluation provide insight into the knowledge, skills, relationships and conditions required to do this.

The "two-way street" basis for this initiative – where both immigrants and receiving community members were called upon to adapt to one another – represented a shift in most people's thinking; earlier efforts focused mainly on what immigrants should do to become contributing citizens. Under a two-way street approach, immigrants are expected to learn English and about the laws and norms in the U.S. and become contributing members to the community. And receiving community members are expected to learn about the immigrants' cultures, engage immigrants in community-wide activities and change the way they provide services (e.g., health, education) to be more responsive to the immigrants' needs. This new approach promoted a dynamic give-and-take process, sought to transform the community such that the "new whole is greater than the sum of its parts," and supported immigrants in retaining their cultural identity.[4] This initiative tested the two-way street concept and generated some learning about its application.

As well, research findings have supported the link between social support and sense of community to health and well-being.[5,6,7] This means that positive encounters and interactions between immigrants and receiving community members and a shared sense of belonging or community among them can lead to positive mental and physical health outcomes. As such, any learning about what it takes to improve social support and foster a shared sense of belonging or community among immigrants and receiving community members is helpful.

Finally, the politically-charged context surrounding immigration- and immigrant-related issues was relevant to grantees. Despite the fact that political controversy centered solely on undocumented immigrants,

CYCLE 1 COMMUNITIES, GRANT RECIPIENTS AND IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION PROJECTS:

1. **Aspen to Parachute:** Family Visitors Program, Community Integration Initiative (CII)
2. **Boulder County:** City of Longmont, Dialogues on Immigrant Integration (DII) Initiative
3. **El Paso County:** Colorado College and later, Catholic Charities, Pikes Peak Immigrant and Refugee Collaborative (PPIRC)
4. **Gunnison County:** Department of Health and Human Services, Gunnison Immigrant Integration Initiative
5. **Lake County:** Full Circle, Community Integration Collaborative (CIC)
6. **Littleton:** City of Littleton, Littleton Immigrant Integration Initiative (LI3)
7. **Mesa County:** Hilltop Community Resources, Project Common Ground (PCG)
8. **Morgan County:** Morgan Community College, OneMorgan County
9. **Pueblo County:** Catholic Charities, Center for Immigrant and Community Integration (CICI)
10. **Summit County:** Family and Intercultural Resource Center, Global Summit

GRANTEES DEVELOPED AND IMPLEMENTED STRATEGIES TO:

- Create opportunities for immigrants and receiving community members to interact and get to know one another (10 grantees)
- Help receiving community members learn more about the cultures of the newcomers in their community (eight grantees)
- Assist immigrants with their immediate needs and challenges (seven grantees)
- Making information about services and resources more accessible to immigrants (six grantees)
- Help immigrants learn English (six grantees)
- Help immigrants develop their leadership skills and voice their concerns or to participate in mainstream organizations (five grantees)
- Establish immigrant organizations and help immigrants and receiving community leaders engage in or build multicultural coalitions (beyond the steering committees) (two grantees).

for many communities "immigrant" meant "undocumented." This affected encounters and interactions between documented immigrants and receiving community members, which in turn had an impact on the work of the grantees.

LESSONS LEARNED:

The Complexity of Immigrant Integration

As shown in the lessons below, there are many dimensions, levels of change and a wide range of possible outcomes involved with immigrant integration efforts.

LESSON: Successful immigrant integration is about change at four levels – individual, organizational, community and systems – aimed at providing a supportive environment for immigrants and receiving community members.

The immigrant integration process is about changing the way receiving community and immigrant leaders and organizations collaborate to design and implement their programs, build a sense of shared responsibility for the challenges and solutions to their communities' changing demographics, and change the way systems (e.g., health and education) engage and support immigrants.

Comprehensive, sustainable immigrant integration requires that change take place at all four levels, as follows:

- **INDIVIDUAL:** At the individual level, immigrants and receiving community members have to learn about each others' cultures and experiences, address their prejudices and biases about each other and develop relationships with one another. Immigrants also have to strengthen their ability to advocate for themselves.
- **ORGANIZATIONAL:** Organizations that provide health, education, social and other services have to strengthen their ability to respond to immigrants' needs (e.g., provide professional translation and interpretation, develop relationships with influential leaders in immigrant communities).
- **COMMUNITY:** In the larger community, immigrant and receiving community leaders have to develop the skills to collaborate with one another to identify common concerns and mobilize and organize their community members to take collective action.
- **SYSTEMS:** Grantees have to engage local policy and decision-makers (e.g., mayor, county commissioners, major employers, school boards) to consider and make systems changes that lead to increased access to opportunities and resources for immigrants.

The Colorado Trust's Supporting Immigrant and Refugee Families initiative was not framed as a multi-level change initiative; grantees were given leeway to create programs they felt would best fit their community. They were able to tackle numerous issue areas on as few or as many levels as they felt appropriate for their

Immigrant integration efforts are more effective when they only focus on only one or two issue areas – such as health or education – and seek to achieve change across all four levels – individual, organizational, community and systems.

community. As a result, grantees worked to address many issues (e.g., health, education, housing, law enforcement) at the individual and organizational levels only. Change at the community and systems levels was hardest to effect as it required grantees to have stronger community organizing and policy advocacy skills. Additionally, grantees largely perceived systems change as immigration reform – work that they could not undertake using grant funds from The Colorado Trust based on the private foundation being prohibited from supporting lobbying efforts. As well, at the time this initiative began, The Trust did not support advocacy efforts (though it has since become a strong supporter of advocacy work).

The experiences of the grantees show that it is difficult, if not impossible, to design and implement a successful immigrant integration effort that effects change across all four levels when working on multiple issue areas. A more effective strategy would have been to focus on only one or two issue areas – such as health or education – and strive to achieve change across all four levels.

It is more feasible and effective to address one issue area on all four levels. For example: implement an after-school tutoring program for immigrant students (individual level), work with the church to make sure their tutoring programs are accessible to immigrant students (organizational level), organize and mobilize immigrant and receiving parents to be able to work together to advocate for bilingual education (community level) and work with the school district to explore and consider bilingual education (systems level). In contrast, it's difficult to successfully implement an after-school tutoring program (education), work with the employment center to make sure job opportunities are made known to immigrants (employment), organize potluck dinners for immigrant and receiving parents (raising community awareness), and convene immigrants with police officers to discuss their perceptions of one another (law enforcement). And, as described later, grantees must have the capacity (i.e., commitment, knowledge, skills and networks) to address the selected issue.

The Colorado Trust has a long history of supporting initiatives based on the philosophy that the community knows best how to solve their problems. However, the results of this evaluation indicate that without a framework based on literature and evidence ***combined*** with uniquely tailoring an effort to specific communities, it is difficult, if not impossible, for grantees to achieve their goals.

LESSON: Immigrant integration cannot be addressed without also paying explicit attention to individual and institutional biases, perceived and real, that affect people's interactions with one another.

Biases affect relationships between immigrants and receiving community members, among immigrants from different parts of the world, and between immigrants and second- and third-generation Latinos and Mexicans. In some of the grantee communities, receiving community members who were second- and third-generation Americans of Mexican and other Latino ancestry were labeled immigrants. Grantees' work with groups was complicated by perceptions about who is and is not an

Immigrant integration work is complicated by perceptions about who is and is not an immigrant, as well as class differences.

immigrant; class differences also affected these relationships. Discomfort in dealing with group labels based on race, ethnicity and class hindered deeper discussion about immigrant integration in some of the grantee communities. For example, in one grantee community there was mistrust among collaborative members even after five years because they never dealt directly with their racial and class biases.

LESSON: Places where immigrants and receiving community members have frequent contact with one another are ideal targets for integration activities, especially activities designed to build social support and foster a shared sense of belonging or community.

Both immigrant and receiving community respondents to an immigrant integration survey, conducted as part of this evaluation, most frequently reported the workplace as the location where immigrants and receiving community members have frequent contact with one another. However, only a few grantees' implementation plans included activities that involved the workplace, and grantees did not adjust their strategies to incorporate this finding. This could be due to the fact that the initiative was set up to be community-driven, as mentioned earlier. While it is true that grantees typically have the best knowledge about their community, this knowledge should be balanced with evidence-based information.

Still, while the workplace is a setting where immigrants and receiving community members often come together, it is a challenge to engage businesses in integration efforts. A strategy to involve them should be developed early on during planning. Foundations should assess how they can provide support to grantees, or even work directly to engage businesses. For instance, foundations could compile a set of workplace immigrant integration strategies that businesses could adapt. Examples of such strategies include an "information buddy" system that pairs an immigrant worker with a receiving community worker, or vice-versa, to support job-related coaching, while encouraging cross-cultural relationship building; and a drop-in English conversation program where, during lunch breaks, immigrant and receiving community workers and managers can make "small talk" about the workplace culture.[8]

LESSONS LEARNED:
Foundation & Grantee Understandings

In the early stages of an initiative, it is imperative that funders, any technical assistance providers, evaluators and the grantees develop a thorough and common understanding about the strategies and capacities required for immigrant integration work, as well as the direct and indirect outcomes that can be expected from the work. The Trust worked closely with the technical assistance provider and the evaluator in its initiative to provide support to grantees. The Trust's program and evaluation officers, technical assistance providers and evaluators met regularly and held annual retreats to discuss accomplishments, challenges and lessons learned.

LESSON: Funders must be prepared to address difficult questions that emerge from immigrant integration work, particularly that of illegal immigration and the use of foundation funds to advocate for immigrant rights.

The Trust is dedicated to advancing the health and well-being of the people of Colorado. Within this initiative, The Trust made it clear to grantees that since it is prohibited from supporting lobbying activities, grantees were to focus their immigrant integration efforts on community building. This distinction became the elephant in the room for grantees as they felt constrained in their ability to address immigrant integration in a straightforward manner in terms of policy change and social justice. Consequently, it was difficult for grantees to engage, or to keep engaged, some immigrants and immigrant advocates whose priority concern was the welfare of undocumented immigrants.

Immigrant integration efforts should balance what residents know about their community with evidence-based information.

LESSON: It is essential to assess grantees' capacity initially and regularly, and to pace the capacity-building support and evaluation to align with grantees' growing abilities and changing needs over time.

All 10 grantees reported that it was the first time they had engaged in immigrant integration work. There was no assessment at the outset of the initiative and throughout the implementation phase to determine if they had the capacity (i.e., knowledge, skills, commitments and relationships) to execute their ideas and achieve the desired results. A few grantees "bit off more than they could chew" and had to drop some of their strategies during implementation when they realized that they didn't have the knowledge, skills and time to implement them, or that they didn't have the target organization's or system's support (e.g., school, police department).

Initial and ongoing assessments would enable technical assistance providers to systematically examine grantees' capacity needs and plan their support to match the grantees' current abilities and stage of implementation. This approach can help grantees to set realistic expectations, take incremental actions, focus their energy and resources, and even achieve "small wins" that may serve to further motivate them. Evaluators should take the same approach and measure the grantees' capacity changes and improvements, while maintaining focus on the long-term targeted outcomes.

LESSON: Funders that are interested in supporting immigrant integration work need to gather and study the evidence that supports the theory and assumptions underlying their grantmaking strategy. A process to ensure alignment among all participants in the initiative – grantees, technical assistance providers, evaluators and funders – should continue throughout implementation.

The Trust conducted a literature review and convened focus groups to understand the meaning and practice of immigrant integration and then developed a theory of change before releasing its request for proposals. The literature review, however, was not expanded to include the community change literature. Consequently, lessons from community change efforts that were not explicitly labeled or described as immigrant integration, but addressed issues related to the impact of demographic changes, were inadvertently left out of the initiative design. Further, the evaluators and technical assistance providers did not have sufficient time during the design phase to reflect on the information gathered. This would have allowed them to better align the grantmaking strategy with the intended outcomes. This learning underscores the importance of the funder having a formal structure and process, taking the time to reflect on and discuss assumptions, and aligning expectations of the funder, the evaluator and the technical assistance providers before a request for proposals is distributed.

The effort to align the grantmaking, technical assistance and evaluation must continue throughout the implementation phase. While The Trust, evaluator and technical assistance provider for the initiative held annual retreats, they did not have a formal process for revisiting and reflecting on the theory of change, discussing the evaluation's findings and lessons learned, and making evidence-based decisions about mid-course adjustments and subsequent technical assistance priorities. It is important for funders to align the strategies throughout the project.

READ THE FULL EVALUATION REPORT, *Integrating Immigrants in Colorado: Accomplishments, Challenges and Lessons Learned;* **AVAILABLE AT WWW.COLORADOTRUST.ORG.**

Be prepared to address difficult questions that emerge, particularly that of illegal immigration and the use of foundation funds to advocate for immigrant rights.

CONCLUSIONS

The Trust's initiative laid the groundwork in the 10 grantee communities for supporting immigrants' adjustment to their new environment and building the ability of receiving community members, including nonprofit organizations and public institutions, to be welcoming and responsive to the needs of immigrants.

The initiative also uncovered the complexity of funding, supporting and evaluating immigrant integration work. The most effective immigrant integration strategies are ones that target change at multiple levels – individual, organizational, community and systems.[9,10,11] They must simultaneously address biases that people have about those who look and act different from them; increase immigrants' knowledge about their new environment and their ability to advocate for themselves; change policies and practices of public, private and nonprofit institutions to be more welcoming and responsive to immigrants' needs; build social support and foster a shared sense of community between immigrants and receiving community members; and transform the way multiple institutions with related goals and services work together to provide more seamless support to immigrants.

Developing, implementing and supporting strategies that target individual, organizational, community and/or systems changes can make the technical assistance provision and evaluation more challenging. Therefore, it is imperative that funders, technical assistance providers and evaluators spend adequate time during the design phase to align their understanding, expectations and strategies, and clearly communicate their expectations to grantees. It is most important to be certain that everyone involved in the initiative has a shared understanding of what it means for an immigrant integration initiative to be effective and successful. All parties involved also need to agree on a process for continuously reflecting on the evaluation's findings and unanticipated challenges, and be able to make well-informed mid-course adjustments.

ENDNOTES

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