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WRITING SAMPLE

Engaging New Americans in Baltimore's Neighborhoods

SUMMARY OF THE WORK

The proposal includes a gap analysis of the existing supports for integrating immigrants into the fabric of civic life in Baltimore City. Using best practices, the knowledge from local actors and the gap analysis, a program plan to establish welcoming programs and civic training for immigrants is outlined.

Context

Year written:	2013
Job title:	Director of Policy & Civic Engagement Programs
Organization:	Citizens Planning & Housing Association, Inc. (CPHA)
Location:	Baltimore, Maryland, USA
Intended audience:	Foundations and other funding sources
Context:	Document written as a program proposal to be pitched to foundations in an effort to generate interest and secure financial support. Research of nation-wide best practices was conducted, and focus groups were organized of stakeholders and actors in the local immigrant support sector.



Engaging New Americans in Baltimore's Neighborhoods

A case for civic engagement training for New Americans and welcoming training for native-born Americans

"Chicago's growing. Atlanta is too. New York added nearly 60,000 new residents.

But not Baltimore.

At a time when cities across the country are gaining population and young people are flocking to urban centers, Baltimore remains stuck in a decades-long decline."¹

The authors of this Baltimore Sun article from June 2012 report on the many possible reasons for the city's population decline. One thing is certain, however: people leave.

The repercussions of this exodus are well known. Some are more visual, such as vacant buildings and blighted neighborhoods. Others are unseen, but well known, such as the decreasing tax base, which has drastic and unfortunate results: lack of safety and low-performing schools.

Who Will Come?

The Abell Foundation suggested that attracting immigrants to Baltimore could be a solution to curb this population decline, which could buoy the economy, improve the conditions in the schools and make the city safer. Their report, released in 2002, focused on policy changes that would make Baltimore a desirable home for immigrants. *Attracting New Americans Into Baltimore's Neighborhoods* included suggestions such as implementing a sanctuary policy for immigrants living in the city. Recently, Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake garnered international attention for implementing this policy, which is intended to help immigrants feel safe and protected in Baltimore, which will ideally attract and retain more immigrant families in the city. In an NPR interview with her on August 3rd, 2012 she explained, "I thought it was important to include immigrants as a part of our goal of reaching 10,000 families."

While the Mayor's goal to attract 10,000 new households to Baltimore was announced only in the past few years, a previous administration also tried to attract immigrants to Baltimore through a grant funded by a few Baltimore foundations between 2005 and 2007. When the sunset of the grants came, and the administration changed, the city's implementation of the Abell report's suggestions stalled. Mayor Rawlings-Blake's new policy sends the message that she is reinvigorating the City's commitment to attracting immigrant households to Baltimore City. However, this is only one of the many of critical tools that the city does not have the capacity to implement.

¹ Luke Broadwater and Kevin Rector. "As Other Cities Grow, Baltimore Continues to Shrink." *Baltimore Sun*. 28 June 2012.

Will They Be Welcome?

New government policies and recruitment strategies are important, and the Abell Foundation's recommendations rely on proven strategies that are likely to have positive results. The report did not include strategies for the larger community to prepare themselves for and to welcome new neighbors with such diverse life histories, cultures and languages. But, "how can we expect immigrants to integrate successfully if they feel unwelcome or if their neighbors are not prepared to accept them?"² If the city agencies and schools are ready for the immigrants, but the current residents of Baltimore are not, then how can we truly hope the immigrants will choose to stay in the city long-term? Attraction to Baltimore does not guarantee families will remain in Baltimore.

Integration needs to be the keystone of any plan to encourage immigrant households to stay in Baltimore for the long-term. Some aspects of integration include access to jobs, English language classes and support to find housing, all of which are included in the Abell report. However, integration is not a definite outcome of living and working in a given location. Instead, it is a "dynamic, two-way process in which newcomers and the receiving society work together to build secure, vibrant, and cohesive communities."³ While the strategies in the Abell report should shape our City's policies and procedures, additional strategies must be implemented to prepare Baltimore's residents for the newcomers, and prepare the newcomers for the residents.

In the 2003 Carnegie Corporation of New York report, *The House We All Live In: A Report on Immigrant Civic Integration*, the authors assert a general lack of coordination in the United States to meet the "civic and integration needs of immigrants and the receiving communities." The report acknowledges this need, and states, "what's lacking in this area, though, is adequate funding to generate more research, to replicate successful models of civic integration and to promote immigrant leadership and organization."

The Carnegie report goes on to offer eleven suggestions for foundations to support these civic and integration needs. In particular, the report suggests that foundations:

1. fund programs that work to increase local communities' understanding of the immigrant experience; build positive relationships between immigrant and native-born communities; and engage these communities in collaboration around mutual issues of concern; and
2. support programs that develop, nurture and sustain immigrant leadership in civic and political life.

These are two critical elements to immigrant integration, which we can rename for the sake of brevity to (1) welcoming programs for native-born Americans and (2) civic engagement programs for New Americans. As the city's foreign-born population grows, whether through implementation of strategies recommended by the Abell Foundation, or by sheer will of immigrant families, Baltimore residents can be involved in the welcoming of these individuals, and participate in the overall goal of attracting and retaining 10,000 new households.

²The Center for Community Progress. *All Immigration is Local: Receiving Communities and Their Role in Successful Immigration Integration*. 2011.

³ Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees. *Investing in Our Communities: Strategies for Immigrant Integration*. 2006.

What Efforts Exist?

During informal conversations with CPHA in 2011, community association leaders expressed concerns about being unprepared to welcome and involve the immigrants moving into their neighborhoods. CPHA, always striving to provide excellent technical assistance and information to build the capacity of community associations, embarked on a brief research project to identify the local organizations that might be able to assist these receiving communities. After initial conversations with several groups, including Casa de Maryland, CPHA concluded that no organization was currently coordinating neighborhood-level or city-wide welcoming programs for native-born Americans or civic engagement programs for all New Americans arriving in Baltimore (not including citizenship classes).

With the understanding that Baltimore lacked the resources it needed to meet the needs of Baltimore's community association leaders, CPHA formalized the research project by recruiting an intern who began in February 2012. This intern conducted extensive research of proven immigrant integration programs, finding the best practices across the nation, spanning from neighborhood-level to state-wide efforts.

CPHA also continued outreach to the service providers who support Baltimore's foreign-born population and to government liaisons that have direct interaction with immigrants. In addition to individual meetings with these liaisons and providers, CPHA invited all of these individuals to a meeting in March 2012 to discuss and better understand the gaps in service that exist in Baltimore.

During this meeting, the attendees identified several areas of concern for foreign-born new arrivals. While the discussion covered a variety of topics including fear of public transportation and lack of financial literacy, those present also discussed the lack of knowledge among immigrants about community involvement, voting, documentation, taxes and generally how the government system works. During this meeting it became clear that this information was not readily available to all of the immigrant populations living in Baltimore.

Following the meeting in March, CPHA met with more organizations through the summer and created an informal gap analysis. The findings show that while Baltimore has many advocacy groups and legal service providers that serve all types of immigrants, the immigrant integration programs in Baltimore serve only certain ethnic groups or groups with specific rights (such as refugees or asylees). And, none of these programs provide civic engagement training beyond citizenship classes, which primarily focus on national political involvement rather than on local civic engagement. Most recently a small BCF grant supported efforts in Northeast for outreach to refugees (IRC) in an engagement process.

CPHA has identified a gap that it is uniquely qualified to fill. CPHA has a long history of providing civic engagement and community leadership classes to Baltimore residents, and currently offers an annual series called Activate Your Inner Citizen. CPHA develops curriculum and coordinates with local experts to deliver quality skill-building training events. Building from this strength, CPHA is prepared to create civic engagement training materials for Baltimore's foreign-born populations, to collaborate with allies who work directly with these individuals, and to coordinate a civic engagement training program for immigrants.

In addition, CPHA actively cultivates relationships with community associations and their leadership. CPHA provides them with technical support and the resources they need to strengthen Baltimore's neighborhoods. CPHA is ready to provide strategic support to Baltimore's communities by providing technical assistance and training so that neighborhood associations can welcome the immigrants moving into their areas.

CPHA's proposed projects will help Baltimore become a more prominent destination city for immigrants, both those who are new arrivals, and those who are moving from other areas of the country. A city whose residents are prepared, respectful and culturally sensitive will be more successful at encouraging New Americans to choose Baltimore as their home.

Proposed CPHA Projects

Welcoming Programs for Native-Born Americans

"A focus on receiving communities will lay the groundwork for success, and it ultimately will make all other parts of the resettlement and integration efforts easier."⁴ CPHA proposes three projects to help Baltimore be a more welcoming place for immigrants. As described by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, these projects are intended to, "increase local communities' understanding of the immigrant experience; build positive relationships between immigrant and native-born communities; and engage these communities in collaboration around mutual issues of concern."

1. **Training for Community Association Leaders.** CPHA will work with key partners to create a training curriculum unique to Baltimore that teaches community leaders about cultural sensitivity. This course, or series of courses, would introduce residents to important aspects of immigration in America, and educate community members about the most respectful ways to welcome and engage the New Americans. Each course would be accompanied by a CPHA Tip Sheet, which would serve as a resource to course participants. Instructional workshops like this are the building block on which welcoming communities are built, because residents involved in their community associations play an important role in shaping the perception and reception of immigrants in the neighborhood.
2. **Increasing Cultural Awareness.** CPHA will collaborate with local university professors and students to create Cultural Information Brochures, which would be made for each of the ethnicities of New Americans living in Baltimore. These brochures would be shared with social workers, public school teachers, and businesses who are hiring immigrants. The brochures would include information about the cultural norms of that ethnicity, and some background information on the country or countries the individuals would be emigrating from. The brochure would also include a profile of an individual of that ethnicity living in Baltimore. With information that helps them understand the background and position of particular immigrant groups, professionals, neighborhood leaders and the broader Baltimore community could be better ambassadors to New Americans.
3. **Collaboration Around Mutual Issues of Concern.** The national organization, Welcoming America, has compiled best practices from around the country into a helpful document called the *Receiving Communities Toolkit: a Guide for Engaging Mainstream America in Immigrant Integration*. The Toolkit describes three critical strategies for creating a welcoming environment for immigrants: (1) connect new arrivals with native-born Americans through common projects and through dialogue, (2) conduct a strategic media and communications campaign to frame the arrival of immigrants in a positive and supportive way, and (3) develop allies amongst the political leadership through strategic relationship building.

⁴ The Center for Community Progress. *All Immigration is Local: Receiving Communities and Their Role in Successful Immigration Integration*. 2011.

While CPHA could be a valuable partner in implementing the last two strategies identified in the Toolkit, CPHA's unique relationship with neighborhood associations and their leaders lends itself to leading the implementation of the first recommended strategy in the Toolkit. Partnering with immigrant service providers, CPHA would work through community associations to increase dialogue between residents and the new arrivals by establishing projects that address a mutual issue of concern.

This project would incorporate training for community association members, other residents, and the immigrant community, and would be tailored to the community's unique goals. Several groups in Baltimore have discussed partnering with CPHA and building off of pre-existing programs or projects, such as the Communities for All Ages program in South East Baltimore, CHAI's Community Conversations program, the International Rescue Committee's efforts in North East Baltimore, and a project in East Baltimore with Casa de Maryland. These proposed partnerships and this early support for this initiative demonstrates the need and the mounting energy to conduct efforts such as this.

Civic Engagement Training for New Americans

Reports such as the 2007 CEO's for Cities report (co-written by Baltimore's Paul Brophy), the 2004 Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy report, and the 2003 Carnegie Corporation of New York report, all list promoting civic engagement as critical to immigrant integration.

CPHA will prepare citizen engagement training that is specific to immigrants. This training would mirror CPHA's long-running Activate Your Inner Citizen training, but would include new curriculum to address questions often raised by immigrants: What is a community association? What can they do for me? How does the local government work? How do I access city resources and assistance?

During CPHA's meeting with service providers who work directly with immigrants, attendees agreed that this type of training would be helpful, and that immigrants are often confused about how the American system works, and specifically how things work in Baltimore. This type of training would assist immigrants in their integration process, and would introduce these New Baltimoreans to essential information about local means of civic engagement.