

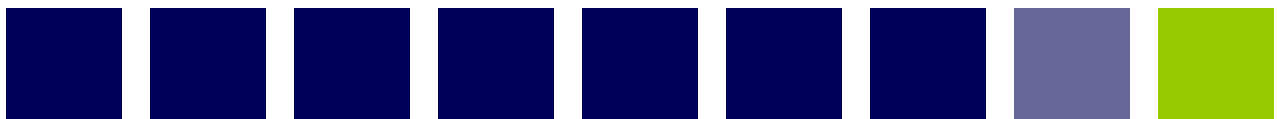


Conclusions & Next Steps

Section X of the
2006-2007 Travis County Immigrant Assessment

Conducted by
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Conclusions and Next Steps

Why now?

When the assessment process began in late 2005, the immigration issue, while a rising concern, was still under the surface of public discourse. In the ensuing months, it attracted increasing attention in the form of legislative proposals, community conversations and grassroots activism. Combined with this heightened awareness of the issue, the current robust economy creates a timely opportunity to engage in a substantive community problem solving process.

What next?

As the assessment process ends, the community can begin the work of collaboratively addressing the needs and issues identified herein. The community could proceed by building on existing planning efforts, and/or identifying a new entity, to (1) lead and engage the community in addressing these issues, (2) determine the scope and focus of the work, and (3) maintain community connections and broaden the network of participants. Discussions could begin by convening different sets of stakeholders to explore the different angles of the issue.

Where do we start?

To navigate the complexity of the immigration issue and perspectives on it, this assessment endeavored to employ an information-driven, accurate, balanced and inclusive approach. Its conclusions are similarly neutral, and apply broadly to the entire community (including all its residents, sectors, and activities). These conclusions sketch the overarching themes that emerged from the assessment, suggest ideas for future action, and offer questions to spark the community conversation.

1. Immigrants are part of and impact the Travis County community. Their success and well-being is tied to the long-term prosperity of the entire community.

As debate around immigration continues and Travis County emerges as an “immigrant gateway,” our community’s task remains to ensure the health, safety and well-being of all residents. To do so requires that public responses to community concerns incorporate a holistic and collective approach that includes immigrants and immigration-related issues. Without this inclusive perspective, the community’s long-term prosperity is compromised.

Next Steps: Acknowledge that immigrants are and will continue to be an integral part of the community. Examine social equity issues from this perspective.

Questions for Further Discussion:

- On a local level, how do our policies and practices act to include or exclude immigrant groups?
- What role do the public, private, and nonprofit sectors play in helping or hindering the integration of immigrants in the community?

- To what extent does the community's response to immigrants limit or enhance the contributions they can make and define their membership in the community?
- To what extent does the community's response to other issues (such as basic needs and healthcare) accommodate the immigrant population?
- How can the community capitalize upon immigrants' economic and cultural contributions?

2. Travis County's immigrants exhibit diversity in culture, socio-economic characteristics, and experiences in the U.S.

Immigrants vary in their countries of origin, languages spoken, reasons for immigrating, and the cultural norms and values they bring. Some immigrants are newly arrived, and others have lived in the community for decades. Immigrants are represented on both sides of the socio-economic spectrum, in terms of both educational attainment and income, and possess skills needed by the local economy. The unique interplay of these factors for each individual shapes their experiences, opportunities, and sense of integration into the community.

Next Steps: Facilitate community conversation and information exchange to better understand the constantly changing dynamics of immigration in Travis County. Monitor trends and continue exploration of immigrant issues.

Questions for Further Discussion:

- Do specific populations and topics warrant more in-depth examination? Where is further research needed?
- How closely do public perceptions of immigrants in Travis County align with the demographics and characteristics of the population?
- If a gap exists between perception and reality, how can it be addressed?

3. Some immigrant sub-populations have higher needs and encounter greater challenges. These challenges are linked to both socio-economic and immigration-related characteristics.

Being an immigrant frequently entails a prescribed set of challenges. Some are common to all or most immigrants, such as adjusting to a new culture and the loss of family, friends, community, and support systems from the home country. Many immigrants also face language barriers. For some individuals and families, opportunities and quality of life are further limited by their legal status, which governs access to resources and basic protections.

Socio-economic status has the potential to alleviate or augment the impacts of these challenges. Much like it does for the general population, socioeconomic factors (such as education, occupation and income) affect immigrants' ability to meet basic needs and to pursue opportunities leading to upward mobility.

The barriers immigrants experience may be immigrant-related, socio-economic, or some combination of both. To effectively serve individuals and families with high needs requires understanding their unique vulnerabilities, strengths, challenges and opportunities. To make service delivery systems inclusive of this population requires consideration of the links between individuals, systems and policy.

Next Steps: Convene stakeholders to identify ways to improve service delivery to immigrants. Review approaches to immigrant issues, taken in Travis County and in other communities, in order to identify best practices and inform local strategies.

Questions for Further Discussion:

- How can the community adapt existing institutions, systems, and planning efforts to be more inclusive of immigrant populations?
- How can the community develop or expand capacity to serve immigrant populations and address immigrant issues that fall outside the traditional service delivery system?
- What initiatives are taking place within immigrant communities and how can local resources support them?
- What can we learn from other communities in order to make our service delivery more effective and inclusive?
- What steps can be taken toward cultural competence in government and non-profit systems?

4. *Immigration systems, and the laws and policies related to them, are complex, changing and frequently unclear.*

The convergence of varied interests in the political, economic, and social welfare arenas results in ambiguous policies and inconsistent practices. Multiple challenges result. Immigrants may not be aware of their rights, the resources available to them, or sources for reliable information. Local governments and community-based organizations must stay informed of immigration-related laws and policies in order to appropriately serve clients and residents. Lastly, employers struggle to balance their business needs with their legal responsibilities.

While the prospects for comprehensive immigration reform remain unclear, potential outcomes include a broader guest worker program and/or a path to lawful permanent residency and citizenship for undocumented immigrants currently living in the United States. Such changes would likely have broad impacts for the community, including an increased demand for social services and for immigration-related legal services.

Next Steps: Inform multiple stakeholders. Provide current information and conduct outreach and training for immigrants, service providers, businesses, and local governments. Identify processes and structures to sustain an ongoing exchange of information.

Questions for Further Discussion:

- What information do different stakeholders need?
- How can this information be appropriately delivered to different sectors?
- What information systems and outreach/training efforts already exist? How can the community replicate and build upon them, either locally or regionally?
- Given the complexity and variability of immigration-related policy, what kind of information system can gather, centralize, update and disseminate the information needed by the community?
- If comprehensive immigration reform occurs, what potential impacts could be expected on the local level? What planning or action would be needed?

5. Federal, state and local authorities disagree on who is responsible for the immigration issue.

While the federal government has jurisdiction to set and enforce broad laws and policies, it can fall to states and local governments to define their roles in immigration enforcement. Local communities, often with limited resources, are ultimately responsible for meeting the needs of immigrant residents, including their education, healthcare and safety.

Next Steps: Impact policy. Establish communication networks between different levels of government so that immigration policy reflects and addresses the real needs and costs of local communities.

Questions for Further Discussion:

- What are the community's interests and values around immigration and meeting the needs of immigrant residents?
- What policies can be developed or modified locally?
- What does the community want to convey to state and federal policy makers?
- How can the local community best communicate its messages and who is best situated to do it?