City and County Implementation of Community-Based Immigration Legal Services

ActionNYC

New York City's Model

as of 12/7/2016

NYC
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CITIES for ACTION

Acknowledgements

The New York City Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs under the leadership of Mayor Bill de Blasio would like to thank the partners involved in the design and implementation of ActionNYC, a community-based immigration legal services program.

Our current partners include:

- Academy of Medical and Public Health Services
- Arab American Association of New York
- Atlas: DIY
- Bridge.us
- BronxWorks
- CAMBA Inc.
- Catholic Charities New York
- Center for Family Life
- Center for Popular Democracy
- City University of New York
- Fifth Avenue Committee
- Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement
- Legal Aid Society
- LSA Family Health Service
- Lutheran Social Services of New York
- Make the Road New York
- The New York Community Trust
- New York City Department of Education
- New York City Health + Hospitals
- New York City Human Resources Administration
- New York Immigration Coalition
- New York Legal Assistance Group
- Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation
- NYU Lutheran Family Health Centers
- Queens Library
- The Robin Hood Foundation
- Sanctuary for Families

This toolkit would not have been possible without the work of Moeena Das, Sabrina Fong, Lucia Goyen, Omar Hakim, Luke Hayes, Maribel Hernández Rivera, Christopher Huang, Sonia Lin, Gloria Medina, Sarah Nolan, and Kavita Pawria-Sanchez, under the guidance of New York City Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs Commissioner Nisha Agarwal.

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About Cities for Action

Cities for Action is a coalition of over 100 mayors and municipalities that are leading the effort to support stronger, safer, and more economically prosperous cities and counties through immigration action.

Executive Summary

In December 2015, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio announced the creation of ActionNYC, a citywide community-based immigration legal services initiative designed to provide immigrant New Yorkers with immigration legal services in the neighborhoods where they live and in the languages that they speak. In doing so, Mayor de Blasio affirmed his commitment to the deep belief that the well-being of the city depends on the well-being of its immigrant residents.

This toolkit represents some of New York City's most important learnings about designing and launching a program like ActionNYC that provides immigrants with trusted, high-quality, and community-based immigration-related services. Our hope is that with this resource, other cities and towns across the nation will be able to conceptualize and implement similar programs to deliver community-based immigration legal services at scale.

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Background

Why Municipalities Should Invest in Community-Based Immigration Legal Services

In a nation with over 42 million immigrants—11 million of which are estimated to be undocumented—there is a critical need to connect all immigrants with safe, community-based, and culturally competent immigration legal services.

Immigrants are the cornerstone of municipalities across the nation and make our cities economically stronger, safer, and more vibrant. As cities, it is our responsibility to support these individuals and communities in order to promote their full integration into all aspects of city life, which will ensure the continued economic growth of municipalities across the nation. Immigration status is a foundational underpinning that opens doors to immigrants for the benefit of their families, and by extension, their cities.

Through the provision of community-based legal services, not only do municipalities protect immigrants but they ensure continued access to justice and opportunity. Moreover, by investing in community-based immigration legal services that reach individuals in their communities and in their own languages, municipalities enhance the economic, civic, and social integration of immigrants.

Snapshot of ActionNYC: New York City's Community-Based Immigration Legal Services Program

ActionNYC Goals:

1. Deliver legal services at scale to maximize the number of people who can improve their immigration status
2. Connect immigrants to free, safe, and high-quality immigration legal services as a fraud-prevention strategy
3. Provide immigrant New Yorkers with connections to other relevant services
4. Build City and field capacity for the provision of high quality immigration legal services

ActionNYC is operated jointly by the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, the Human Resources Administration, and the City University of New York. The program is implemented in collaboration with 18 community-based organizations and legal services providers across the five boroughs.

In an effort to provide trusted and secure legal services at the community level, ActionNYC adopted a community navigation model of providing immigration legal services. Under the supervision of an experienced immigration attorney, individuals from the community are hired to help immigrants navigate the process of understanding their legal options.

ActionNYC is comprised of three pillars:

1. Outreach and Marketing
2. Community Navigation
3. Legal Services

These pillars are connected by technology to allow for seamless provision of free and safe immigration legal services. Technology also offers a means to measure program success.

At community navigation sites across the five boroughs, immigrant New Yorkers can receive safe and secure immigration legal screenings regarding their immigration legal options, assistance with straightforward applications, and advice from immigration legal experts. In addition, ActionNYC hosts legal clinics in schools across the City and has begun to bring services to hospitals.

In an effort to reach immigrants in the languages they speak and in the neighborhoods where they live, all of ActionNYC's partners demonstrate deep ties to various communities across New York City.

ActionNYC refers all clients to relevant social services, including the City's municipal ID program, educational services, and healthcare enrollment.

Planning

Consider the following as you begin to plan a community-based immigration legal services program for your municipality.

The Project Plan

The success of any community-based immigration legal services program depends on a strong project plan. Creating a strong plan will allow your municipality to clearly articulate your program's vision, what you hope to achieve, timeline and deadlines, metrics for success, activities/tactics to adopt in order to meet your goals, and factors that may hinder success.

In developing a project plan, identify your program's goals. To help create goals, consider the following:

- How will you define success?
- What demand do you anticipate from your municipality's residents, and how might this affect the scope of the program?
- Are there certain populations you would like to focus on within your municipality's immigrant communities?
- How many individuals do you aim to serve?
- Do you want to start small (with a pilot project) or launch at full scale?
- Do you want to focus legal resources on straightforward cases, complex cases, or both? If straightforward cases only, how will you handle complex cases that may arise—and vice versa?
- What is your budget, and how many community partners would you like/are you able to fund through the program?

How will you know if your program is successful?

- Are there certain targets or milestones you want to achieve, such as a specific number of individuals reached or a certain number of cases opened for application assistance?

What are some constraints that may impede the effectiveness of your project plan and the ability to adapt implementation of your program?

- How much time do you have to plan for and implement the program?
- What funding resources are potentially available to invest in the program?
- Which skills will you need to cultivate in your staff to design and implement the program?
- What are the technological tools you may need to develop?
- Where is your target demographic located? How will you reach them?
- What resources will you need to successfully implement and sustain the program?

Additional Considerations

- As part of your planning process, consider conducting a landscape analysis to evaluate what kinds of community-based and immigration legal services already exist for immigrant communities. This will help inform the types of partners you choose to work with, key social services it may be useful to connect with, and locations in your municipality where the program should be implemented.
- Review existing immigration legal services programs in your municipality to avoid duplication of efforts and maximize collaboration.
- As part of the planning process, conduct demographic research to understand the immigrant communities your program will serve and their corresponding needs.
- Prior to finalizing your program's goals and the plan for your municipality, consider convening key stakeholders to solicit input on the model and plan.

The Budget

Once the project plan is developed, you need to consider the financial resources required to implement your program. When creating a budget, evaluate the criteria below:

How many people will you serve—and in what time frame?

- This will help identify the number of field organizers and community navigation sites you need to account for

What are the staffing requirements to implement and manage the program? When considering this need, think about:

- How many individuals are included in each community navigation team? (New York City's model includes three navigators and one attorney per navigation team)
- How many individuals can a navigation and legal team see each day?
- What are your projected office hours for the week? How many work weeks does your locality have per year?

What program implementation expenses will you require? Some examples include:

- Program management staff
- Marketing and brand development
- Translation and interpretation
- Creation and management of a municipality-wide hotline
- Long-term program evaluation
- Technological tools, such as:
    - Appointment tool
    - Online legal screening tool
- Operational costs, such as:
    - Hardware (computers, tablets, printers, etc.)
    - Office supplies and materials (folders, paper, etc.)
    - Software licenses

Once you identify costs and quantities, you will need to estimate prices. You can do this by:

- Reviewing contracts your municipality may already have with vendors.
- Researching vendors online to get price estimates. A best practice is to average prices from two or three vendors, or use the highest price as a conservative cost estimate.
- Analyzing market rates for different staff positions to arrive at an estimated salary. You can also research salaries from existing public contracts.
- Consider comparing the proposed program's costs with other similar initiatives in your municipality.

Sample Budget

One-Time Expenses	Cost Per Unit	Quantity	Total Cost
Software Development			
Computers			
iPads			
Printers			

On-Going Expenses	Cost Per Unit	Quantity	Total Cost
Printed Materials			
Translation			
Travel			
Training			
Folders for Clients			

Totals			

Implementation Timeline

After designing your project plan, the next step is to create an implementation timeline. This requires evaluating what it will take to successfully implement your program.

Questions to ask include:

- Do you need to launch the program by a certain date or within a particular timeframe? Consider a soft and hard launch period.
- How long will it take to develop infrastructure, such as technology or the program's brand/marketing?
- Do you have funding available to implement the program? If not, how long will it take to secure funding?
- Do you have staff in place to design and manage the program? If not, how long will it take to hire? How long will it take your community-based partners to hire their own program staff?
- Are you going to implement the program through a public funding stream? If so, will you need to undergo a procurement process? How long will that process take for your municipality?

Implementation Timeline

	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4	Month 5
Program Strategy/ Operations	Finalizing Service Flow		Contract with Program Partners		
Staffing	Hire Program Manager	Hire Legal Counsel		Hire Coordinators	
Marketing				Draft Creative	Identify Ad Buys
Printed Materials			Draft Program Documents		Print and Distribute
Outreach				Approve Outreach Plan	Train Outreach Staff
Technology	Draft Scope and Requirements		Development Complete		Test System

Outreach

First and foremost, during the project planning phase it is important to identify your target population and tailor outreach efforts accordingly. In particular, field outreach is essential to ensure that your program reaches more vulnerable communities. Building trust within immigrant communities is essential to outreach, and is best achieved by working closely with community-based partners and stakeholders to gain feedback and educate about the benefits of free and safe immigration legal services.

Potential Target Communities

- Use U.S. Census data and feedback from partners and stakeholders about communities that are likely to access the program and would benefit from it. Also consider internal data your municipality may have available.
- When conducting outreach, consider distance from main roads or highways, proximity to target communities, and accessibility by public transportation or other means of travel for community navigation sites. Clients are more likely to attend initial and follow-up appointments if sites are readily accessible to their homes and workplaces.

Potential Outreach Partners and Stakeholders

- Collaborate with existing trusted organizations in target communities that already provide supportive services for immigrants.
- Train partners and stakeholders about your City's approved program, the nature of services being provided, and how to refer potential clients. Engage stakeholders through one-on-one meetings, coalition-building, regular briefings, and trainings. Outreach partners may include City agencies, schools, religious institutions, unions, law enforcement entities, consulates, libraries, and community- or service-based organizations.

Develop Outreach Tactics and Materials

- Employ a variety of outreach tactics, such as:
    - Street and door-to-door canvassing
    - Presentations to key community partners and other stakeholders (i.e., schools, religious institutions, community-based organizations, etc.)
    - Partnerships with other municipal agencies to disseminate information
- Create content in plain language that is easy to translate into the languages of the communities you are targeting.
- Allow time to translate all materials into multiple languages. Different dialects or terms may resonate better with certain groups. Consider asking community partners to translate or review to ensure that outreach materials are appropriate for target groups.

Campaign Timeline

- Begin outreach efforts with a soft launch of the program one or two weeks before full launch (to test technology tools and messaging tactics).
- Communicate with ethnic and community press outlets to get the word out about the program.
- Conduct direct, person-to-person outreach in conjunction with briefings and presentations to community partners.
- Be flexible, as priorities and metrics for organizers may shift depending on demand for the program. For example, if there is strong program demand, focus may shift from traditional outreach to conducting confirmation calls or other activities that better support the program's goals.

Hiring and Training Organizers

- Consider guiding outreach partners with profiles of the type of organizer that might be appropriate to hire for the program. Encourage hiring bilingual organizers with relevant experience and deep ties to immigrant communities.
- A solid foundational and ongoing training plan is important to ensure that outreach partners and organizers know what to do. For training, consider emphasizing:
    - Cultural fluency, so organizers are able to navigate sensibilities within different immigrant communities, including race, gender, and religion
    - How to handle data privacy and concerns about program privacy
    - Activities that allow organizers the opportunity to model how they will interact with potential clients
    - Modules on navigating technology
    - Exercises that foster creative thinking and solutions, particularly if outreach activities are technology dependent
- Post-foundational training: Consider hosting in-person gatherings and trainings after your initial launch. Convening field organizers to review best practices and issues in the field will greatly benefit the program's effectiveness.
- Be sure candidates are aware that evening and weekend activities will frequently occur. Organizing is often done on a non-traditional schedule.

Marketing

Outreach and marketing play an important role in engaging traditionally underserved immigrant communities. In addition to the field outreach described above, consider employing several forms of media to help your municipality's immigrant residents receive relevant program updates and information.

Brand Development

- The brand should include a logo that represents your locality and your city.
- When possible, the look and feel of the brand should be similar to other relevant municipal programs.
- Consider creating "Logo Usage Guidelines" for all partners so your logo is used consistently across all promotional materials. This creates a uniform "look and feel" throughout program collateral.
- In developing your immigration legal service program brand, keep in mind that you want to create:
    - A brand that ties efforts together and provides a validating stamp for partners
    - A brand that deters fraud by helping immigrants distinguish between approved services and fraudulent legal service providers
    - A logo that embodies a message of trust and protection
    - A program name that inspires immigrants to take action

Paid Media: Outdoor Campaign and Ad Buys

- Once campaign materials are completed, it is important to place ads in locales where there is already high foot traffic from your target audiences.
    - Outdoor ad placement locations may include public transportation lines running through immigrant enclaves, along highways or busy thoroughfares, and in popular commercial centers
    - Consider placing ads through targeted and sustained campaigns in ethnic and community newspapers, and television and radio outlets that reflect the top languages spoken by your target communities

ActionNYC Marketing Framework

- ActionNYC sought to counter the rhetoric around immigration that aims to divide. The program created a bridge that represents its commitment to connecting immigrant New Yorkers to City services and government.
- The ActionNYC brand is similar to the IDNYC brand (the City's municipal ID program).
- Upon official launch, ActionNYC hosted ethnic media roundtables to reach immigrants in their language and to develop the program's trusted brand.
- ActionNYC partnered with the City's anti-fraud task force in support of their telethon around the Unauthorized Practice of Immigration Law.

Earned Media: Online and Ethnic Media Roundtables

As a complement to paid media efforts, consider focusing on earned media efforts.

- Some online media efforts to consider include:
    - Creating a dedicated website or clearinghouse of information that is easy for immigrants to access and navigate
    - Posting information across multiple languages on social media—an active source of program updates and information
- Similarly, consider informing ethnic media about how immigrant communities can access services. Forums such as ethnic media roundtables can serve as a venue for community testimonials, sharing progress, and allow municipalities to reach specific communities.

Additional Non-Traditional Marketing Methods

- Other important non-traditional marketing methods to consider include:
    - Radio ads
    - Public service announcements (PSAs)
- Live telethons

Sample ActionNYC Ads

Navigation

To develop trust and provide legal services at the community level, consider the community navigation model. This model was developed at the national level by the National Partnership for New Americans (NPNA) and adapted at the municipal level by New York City and its partners, including the New York Immigration Coalition. Under the New York City model, permanent "navigation sites" are established in community-based organizations located in immigrant-dense neighborhoods across the municipality.

These organizations then hire community navigators who work under the supervision of an experienced immigration attorney to:

- Screen individuals for immigration relief eligibility
- Provide application assistance when appropriate
- Connect individuals to relevant social services through referrals
- Participate in large-scale immigration legal screening clinics

Hiring and Training

Many factors go into hiring skilled teams that will provide high-quality, culturally competent outreach and immigration legal services. Encourage the hiring of bilingual navigators who not only have a bachelor's degree and/or relevant experience, but who are themselves from the community and able to relate to the clients they will serve. It is important to provide navigation teams with ongoing training to ensure provision of consistent, high-quality services across the program.

When developing a foundational training for these individuals, consider including:

- A survey of fundamentals of immigration law
- In-depth modules on specific types of immigration benefits the program will cover
- Best practices on document collection for individual cases
- Interviewing skills
- Cultural competency
- Use of technology and case management
- Information about other social services available in the community (i.e., health, education, municipal ID, housing)
- Immigration legal services fraud prevention
- Trainings are most effective if they incorporate hypothetical examples, case studies, and role-play that allow participants to gain hands-on experience applying concepts as they learn them. It is important to schedule additional sessions for review of materials, group-building, and reflection. Finally, consider arranging a visit to a local USCIS office or attending a naturalization ceremony.
- A series of monthly follow-up trainings in substantive law and skill-building are useful supplements for building confidence and team capacity. As with organizers, consider hosting gatherings/trainings after your initial launch. Getting all navigators together in a room to review best practices and issues in the field will greatly benefit the program's effectiveness. It will also help build a sense of camaraderie among navigators and make them feel like part of a team.

Additional Considerations

In designing a community navigation training program, consider working toward the goal of obtaining Board of Immigration Appeals Recognition and Accreditation for community-based organizations and staff members. This will build the field's capacity, even in the absence of a coordinated municipal program.

Legal Services Provision

In designing a legal services program with community navigators as an integral part, it is critical to ensure that navigators are supervised by experienced immigration attorneys who:

- Review eligibility determinations made by navigators
- Provide legal advice to clients
- Directly represent clients in straightforward cases
- Provide referrals for complex cases

When designing the legal services element of your program, consider the following:

- Adopting a ratio of at least three navigators to one attorney. This increases efficiency and is most effective if the attorney's case load focuses on straightforward, rather than complex, cases.
- Guiding partners with profiles of the type of lawyer that might be appropriate to hire for this program. Encourage hiring lawyers who have at least three years of experience in immigration legal services and admission to any state bar, prior experience supervising staff, and the ability to work with diverse individuals and communities.
- Supplementing services provided at navigation sites through rotating clinics intended to reach geographies and/or populations that are not fully served by your navigation sites. Clinics work best if they focus on immigration legal screenings and/or just one type of straightforward immigration relief (i.e. naturalization, Temporary Protected Status, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, etc.).

Technology

Technology can be a tremendous asset to your program—in both bringing services to communities and helping your municipality connect individuals to community-based immigration legal services through a centralized mechanism. Technology is also a critical tool for collecting the data required to measure performance and evaluate your program's success. At the same time, designing and implementing the right technology can be complicated and time-intensive.

Uses of Technological Tools

Technology may be used to:

- Coordinate demand for services by connecting outreach and marketing efforts with an appointment-making tool that centralizes navigators' availability to accept new clients.
- Streamline legal services delivery through an online screening tool that allows navigators to efficiently screen clients to determine eligibility for immigration benefits.
- Facilitate case management by allowing program staff at navigation sites to manage each individual's case, including tracking progress, application assembly, and document management.
- Facilitate reporting and ongoing program evaluation through data collection and electronic reporting.

Initial Development Phase

Technology choices should always follow from your program's goals, strategy, and model—not the other way around.

Consider these factors in designing a technology plan:

- What is the budget?
- What is the timeline?
- Who will use the tools and what are user needs?
- Is the program collaborating or sharing data with other organizations?
- What are ways to make your tools user friendly?

Data Security

Program staff at navigation sites will be collecting sensitive private data about individuals that must be adequately safeguarded to meet legal and ethical obligations and to build trust in your program. In designing or selecting technology tools, consider:

- Privacy: What kind of data will be collected about individuals? Who will have access to the data and how long will it be kept? This is especially relevant for

municipalities with strict data privacy laws.
- Confidentiality: What are the applicable laws and best practices on data confidentiality? How will attorney-client privilege be maintained?
- Security: Are there local, state, or federal information technology security requirements that may apply?
- Data ownership: Who owns the data? What happens to the data if there is a change in management or a different technology solution is desired?

Implementation

Technology solutions require careful planning and usually require long lead times to implement. In choosing or designing technology solutions, consider the following:

- Ensure appropriate time for a lawyer to research applicable law and to design data security and confidentiality policies.
- Plan to spend at least three months on development; timeframe will vary depending on the size and scope of your project.
- Determine whether technology solutions should store data in a cloud or on premise.
- Choose hardware (i.e., computers) that meet the minimum required specifications for your application or system.
- Standardize hardware as much as possible to reduce costs of deployment, support, and repair.
- Allot time for a testing period to identify and address bugs. As your program rolls out, ensure that on-call help is available to address glitches and technical difficulties.
- Create paper-based backup tools in case the technology does not function as anticipated.
- Account for ongoing development of technological tools in your budget. As the program rolls out, needs may change and technology will have to adapt.

Staffing and Training

Staffing and technological implementation are as important as the planning phase. Consider the following:

- Training: Create a robust training plan so staff knows how to use your systems. Trainings should not be done in isolation, but in context and integrated with your general program service delivery trainings.
- Documentation: Document your program policies and protocols. Produce user guides and create “one-pagers” covering the most frequently asked questions.
- Support: Provide adequate resources to support any technical or user issues. This is also an excellent area from which to collect feedback that can improve your systems.

Conclusion

The ability of community-based immigration legal services and the potential that municipalities hold to ensure economic, social, and legal justice for immigrants and integration to all components of society is powerful. New York City's ActionNYC is just one example of how a municipality can build a program that benefits the city's immigrants, regardless of fluctuations in offerings by federal programs.

There is still much to be learned from ActionNYC and implementation of the program's community navigation framework. While this toolkit does not capture the totality of the work and experiences of New York City or other municipalities, the information presented here can serve as a guide for your municipality as you begin to envision designing and implementing your own community-based legal services program. This document is also a reflection of New York City's collective continued commitment towards advancing the interests of our immigrants and creating a more inclusive society.