

BEYOND STATE LEGISLATION: A PRIMER ON LOCAL ADVOCACY STRATEGIES

In the current political climate, local advocacy represents the frontlines in the fight for immigrant rights. Even in a state like California, there are cities and counties that continue to lag behind on protecting immigrants from mass deportation and, even in the most progressive localities, there is an opportunity to advance policies that go beyond mere protectionism and pave the way for true immigrant equity and inclusion.

HOW DO I START TO ENGAGE IN THIS TYPE OF WORK?

- 1 Connect with the local coalitions in your area who are already doing this work.** In many counties, you will find that a local coalition has already been promoting immigrant rights for years. By linking up with the local coalition in your community, you can develop a coordinated strategy and build upon their work; coordination is essential to guard against local elected officials attempting to divide advocates and community members.
- 2 Collect information on the ordinances, resolutions and motions** your city council, Board of Supervisors and School Board have been able to pass. Key things to look for when doing this research include searching for “Sanctuary” or “Welcoming City” resolutions, as well as “Safe Space” School Board resolutions.
- 3 Choose effective strategies using the ICE out of CA Implementation Guide** available at www.iceoutofca.org. This guide contains valuable information on how advocates can meet with the local Sheriff or Police Department to inquire about their policies regarding collaboration with DHS agencies.



BUILDING STRONGER LOCAL POLICIES

FOR PROGRESSIVE AREAS

This refers to areas that have been able to pass very strong anti-deportation policies, leaving advocates and public officials uncertain about what other measures can be taken to advance true equity for immigrants. These areas can look into more creative ways of protecting against detention and deportation outside of the traditional local law enforcement route. Some areas to think about to strengthen your local policies even more include:

- 1 Using the Welcoming San Jose Plan for Civic, Economic, Linguistic, and Social Integration 2016-2019¹ as a model.** The plan lays out a work plan for three years with benchmarks that commits the county to being inclusive of all immigrants and builds upon the creation of the Office of Immigrant Affairs in the region.
- 2 Sanctuary Workplaces and ways to discourage employers from using E-Verify.** You can refer to the “sanctuary workplace” model policy on www.iceoutofca.org under the resources tab. This would commit employers to develop employees. Other options to explore include advocating for employers to not use the E-Verify system.
- 3 Making School Districts hubs for immigration services.** Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) currently hosts legal clinics at different school sites and has created a pipeline where students are screened and directed to the services they may need (i.e. legal services, mental health services, etc.). While they primarily focus on unaccompanied minors and refugee students, their services are open to all students who may need assistance.

¹ The Welcoming San Jose Plan for Civic, Economic, Linguistic, and Social Integration 2016-2019. <https://www.sanjoseca.gov/DocumentCenter/View/61918>

FOR MODERATE AREAS

This refers to areas that have a mix of moderate and progressive local elected officials and have been able to make some advancements in disentangling DHS from their local law enforcement, however still face some barriers in reaching full disentanglement. Some areas to think about to strengthen your local policies include:

- 1 Revisiting your local law enforcement policy.** Refer to the ICE out of CA sample model policy for local law enforcement available at www.iceoutofca.org. Most local law enforcement policies need to be updated to reflect the passage of SB 54 (CA Values Act). Other key areas that are often overlooked, but provide loopholes for DHS agencies to gain access to individuals include 1.) joint law enforcement task forces and joint criminal operations 2.) ICE access to local law enforcement databases and written materials regarding individuals that are held in local jails and 3.) verbal contact with DHS agencies in the field.
- 2 Think of intersectional approaches to passing progressive immigrant rights policy in your region.** Pro-immigrant policies do not have to explicitly say “immigrants.” Think of intersectional policies that would also impact immigrants in your region, like worker’s rights issues, healthcare issues, reproductive rights, etc. Think of areas that your local elected officials are also passionate about or that specifically impact your region of the state.
- 3 Think of creative ways to redistribute local funding away from local law enforcement.** Think about what you want in your region, not just what you don’t want. This can be a variety of things but could include advocating for the creation of other offices in your County or City (i.e. Office of Immigrant Affairs, Office of Diversion and Reentry, etc.), pushing for funding for community based service providers instead of jails, and/or putting county and city dollars into public education, healthcare, and other services that benefit all communities.

FOR CONSERVATIVE AREAS

This refers to regions of the state where Police-ICE collaboration is rampant, however most local elected officials do not seem willing to safeguard against these practices. Some areas to think about to strengthen your local policies include:

- 1 If your region has not already done so, work on passing a Welcoming or Sanctuary City resolution in your region.** While these resolutions are not binding, they often help to mobilize communities around immigrant rights issues which can be helpful with coalition building for future efforts. It is also a powerful way for local elected officials to stand with immigrant communities.
- 2 Build upon Welcoming or Sanctuary City resolutions.** After a resolution has been passed, use that engagement with local city councils or your Board of Supervisors to continue the conversation on immigrant rights issues and detention and deportation issues you’re seeing in your community. This can help your coalition to build relationships with local elected officials that can be useful in the future when you seek to pass a stronger local policy. Many times local elected officials will categorize work areas and think they’re work on immigrant rights is completed after they’ve voted on the resolution. Don’t let them off the hook!
- 3 Find ways to get data from local law enforcement agencies.** Anyone can obtain information from public agencies through Public Records Act requests. By receiving data from the Sheriff’s Department or Police Department in your region it allows advocates and community members to monitor what’s actually happening and to also hold the department accountable to their written policies. It can also allow advocates to develop local policies in the future that seek to address the areas where DHS agencies are gaining access to individuals. Some important data asks include 1.) the number of individuals interviewed by ICE per month, 2.) number of individuals who deny ICE interviews 3.) number of individuals who agree to an ICE interview but with their attorney present 4.) number of individuals ICE requests notification for 5.) how many individuals ICE responds to the notification request for and 6.) number of individuals transferred into ICE custody upon release and the corresponding convictions.

