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Recommendations and Lessons Learned

from the Summit on Immigrant Needs & Contributions
of Santa Clara County, Fiscal Years 2000-2002

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* The testimony presented here represents findings, recommendations, and logical conclusions from the Summit on Immigrant Needs & Contributions of Santa Clara County, a county-led, community-based process in FY00-01.

Recommendations and Lessons Learned from the Summit on Immigrant Needs & Contributions of Santa Clara County

County Pilot Programs for Immigrants. Create state pilot programs in counties with a high percentage or high count of immigrants to assess and address immigrant needs. These pilots should lead to permanent assessment and coordination bodies in all 58 counties.

Purposes. The purposes of pilot programs would be to provide high-percentage, high-count immigrant counties with coordination in order to

- Provide a systematic multi-lingual culturally proficient assessment of immigrant needs and the needs of their US-born children.
- Problem solve across need areas.
- Promote efficiency and avoid duplication of services in delivery.

Services to Be Funded and/or Coordinated. The following three components should exist for all county programs.

1. Comprehensive Needs Assessment. The experience of Santa Clara County's Summit on Immigrant Needs indicates the following 17 need areas in the following 5 groups should be encompassed in the needs assessment:

Education: Immigrant Children & Youth (including the US-born children of immigrants), Employment Training, English as a Second Language (with literacy), and Immigrant Community Education

Health Issues: Health Care Access and Mental Health

Family Support: Food, Housing, Dependent Care (childcare, youth care, senior care, care for the disabled), Income Maintenance, and Transportation

Economic Empowerment: Wages & Working Conditions and Small Business

Legal Issues: Citizenship, Immigration Legal Services, Domestic Violence, and Criminal Justice

Focus should be placed on the immigrant nationalities with the greatest need, defined as those nationalities with at least 100 immigrants receiving any type of public assistance (SSI, MediCal, CalWORKs, food stamps, General Assistance, CAPI, foster care). If there is a group of less than 100 but with obvious demonstrated proven high levels of need, they should be included.

Research methods should be both

- Quantitative: a survey to public assistance recipients covering the need areas, provided in their language, and
- Qualitative: focus groups with trained bilingual facilitators

The two should complement one another before programs and policies are developed.

Research could be supplemented by a random sample survey of the largest immigrant groups in the county (with a US-born control group), participatory action research, a survey of non-profit agencies serving immigrants, best practice research, and additional research as needed.

An example of the advantage of an up-to-date needs assessment is a recent collaborative grant received by San Jose State University (SJSU) and San Jose City College (SJCC) from Temple University to match college students through service learning with elderly immigrants who need private tutoring to learn civics and English for their U.S. citizenship test. The entire needs assessment for this \$115,000 grant benefiting immigrant seniors was taken from Bridging Borders in Silicon Valley, the summit report.

2. Coordination of Core Programs. Certain core programs for immigrants need to be provided in all high-percentage or high count counties.

- a. Immigrant Community Education.** The Summit on Immigrant Needs found that there was a profound lack of knowledge by all immigrant groups about legal rights, customs, and community resources in all 17 need areas. Santa Clara County produced an *Immigrant Resource Guide* as part of the summit process with background sections on each topic and a list of community resources, including the language capacity of providers. Santa Clara County has just granted \$150,000 to a collaborative of CBOs to update and refine the Immigrant Resource Guide, translate it into 9 languages, post it on a website, and use it as the basis of curriculum for community education in various languages at churches, CBOs, unions, and other grassroots locations.
- b. ESL and Literacy Instruction.** With 7 community colleges, 10 adult education programs each with multiple sites, and many non-profit agencies and churches all offering various ESL classes, Santa Clara County has granted \$15,000 to a consultant who will develop a website of all ESL classes county-wide, including their location, entry requirements, and special foci. One of the findings of the summit was that less literate and elderly immigrants do not feel comfortable with monolingual English-speaking ESL instructors: they need some “real communication” immediately. Therefore a special section will include a listing of bilingual ESL instructors. Many entry-level ESL students could not get into any ESL class; it is hoped this list will provide additional options. With regards to literacy, recognizing that first-language literacy is the first step to English-language literacy, the Santa Clara County Citizenship Program offered Cambodian literacy to elderly and disabled Cambodian women as their path to then learning English (all have since become citizens). Working with the Mexican consulate for pedagogical materials, the Citizenship Program similarly offered Spanish literacy classes for pre-literate Mexicans.

- c. Employment Training.** The summit found that the keys to deep, lasting, and rapid vocational and career training include an assessment of an immigrant's existing skills from his or her home country; a plan to integrate that background into a step-in, step-out set of programs leading up a career ladder; "professional adaptation " courses such as Vocational English as a Second Language specially designed for health professionals; contextual learning; and course scheduling on weekends and evenings, with childcare options.
- d. Safety Net Programs.** With the advent of the Personal Responsibility Act in 1996, it is incumbent that each county continually assess weaknesses in its safety net for immigrants. Finger-print imaging for food stamps, the reach of CAPI, community-based food programs, the two and five-year limits of CalWORKs in meeting the needs of preliterate refugees, access to General Assistance, adequate translation of public benefits notices, the language and cultural competency of eligibility workers and social workers in benefits determinations and orientations, and the adequacy of benefit levels according to county or regional cost of living are some of the assessments which should be undertaken regularly at the local level.
- e. Citizenship.** Santa Clara County's Citizenship Collaborative has worked with more than 20 CBOs in the last five years, which in turn have provided naturalization application and legal assistance to over 55,000 immigrants leading to over 15,000 new citizens. With semiannual Free Citizenship Days in 18 languages, coordinated outreach, and ongoing legal training, this is a model to replicate statewide. Santa Clara County's commitment to citizenship has included paid County positions and \$250,000 in grants to CBOs annually for five years.
- f. Immigration Legal Services.** Non-profit legal service providers accredited by the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) can only charge nominal fees. They rarely find private sources of income and need state or county funding to survive. With recent and expected changes in immigration law, existing providers cannot meet the demand for family reunification, work authorization leading to self-sufficiency, legal help under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), political asylum, and cancellation of removal (a form of relief for deserving long-term immigrants). The five non-profit agencies in Santa Clara County have recently formed an Immigrant Legal Service Providers Association (ILSPA) to better coordinate service delivery, enhance the use of volunteers, provide ongoing training, share legal knowledge, and seek common funding. In addition, Santa Clara County is currently conducting a study of the County's legal needs, including the need for more immigration attorneys.
- g. Translation and Interpretation: Inter-Departmental Coordination and a Community-Based Language Bank.** There is currently little coordination of needed translation and interpretation services provided by different County departments. Improved coordination would be essential. In addition, the summit

suggested that a community-based language bank be developed to meet the language needs of immigrants in an accessible, trustworthy environment; create strong checking mechanisms for accuracy and accountability, including ongoing translator training and the creation of translation standards; posting translated documents on a website; and the development of a pro-rata buy-in plan by government departments (all levels of government), school districts, and CBOs, who may need assistance in translating or interpreting in certain languages for which they have no qualified staff capacity.

h. Immigrant Cultural Proficiency Program. Each county needs to attain minimal standards of immigrant cultural proficiency. This should include not only county departments (especially those having face-to-face interactions with immigrants) but also cities, school districts, and CBOs. Minimal standards should include keeping statistics by country of origin and language of preference in all departments and contracts; using this basis to improve the language capacity and cultural competency of frontline staff (including the requirement of coded bilingual positions); meeting the translation needs of immigrants whenever a reasonable minimal number of customers cannot grasp needed knowledge (the summit suggested that 20 is a reasonable minimal number); and cultural proficiency training on knowledge of immigrant cultures for administrators and staff. Santa Clara County is taking two important steps: it is working to incorporate these components into an Immigrant Cultural Proficiency Initiative this fall and it is about to complete a publication entitled KIN (Knowledge of Immigrant Nationalities) of Santa Clara County, a guide to the history, government, health and educational systems, inter-personal styles, contributions, and conditions of life of immigrants from the 16 “largest neediest” immigrant communities in Santa Clara County.

3. Coordination of Critical Needs: “One Size Does Not Fit All”. In addition to core program coordination, each county possesses distinct immigrant groups, uneven levels of development of immigrant programming, and different resources that can be applied to meet immigrant needs. The following critical needs should be addressed by each county according to these distinct characteristics.

a. Resource Development and Coordination. Each county possesses differing potential funding sources to meet immigrant needs. A county office of immigrant affairs should analyze and coordinate existing federal, state, county, city, United Way, and foundation funding sources for immigrants, striving to achieve an integrated funding mechanism at best and systematic coordination at least. Efforts should be made to expand funding sources through public-private cooperation; provide technical assistance to non-profit agencies serving immigrants; help create new non-profit agencies for emerging immigrant groups, if necessary; and work to co-locate immigrant service providers for cost-effectiveness and single point of delivery. The summit suggested that a Fund for Immigrant and Refugee Empowerment (FIRE) be established to coordinate or

consolidate existing immigrant-related funding sources, patterned after the Colorado and Chicago models. FIRE is under study at this time.

- b. Policy Forum.** A coordinated, countywide common forum should be established to address policy needs at the federal, state, and local levels. This last level should include county city, community college, adult education, and K-12 policy boards. Many of the most critical issues affecting immigrants (e.g. the right to work legally in the U.S., family reunification, access to benefits, the path to citizenship and voting) are made at the federal level. The state makes important decisions about safety net access, access to higher education, driver's licenses, language access, etc. One area that Santa Clara County has identified that requires state action is the issue of removing barriers to licensing for immigrant professionals. Too many professionals with incredible skill sets are working in unskilled positions. Assemblyman Joe Simitian has expressed interest in introducing a bill to facilitate licensing, to create clear licensing career paths, and to standardize the licensing requirements among California's 33 separate licensing boards (plus the Department of Consumer Affairs) which each have different requirements for the professional re-licensing of immigrant professionals by the State. The key policy changes recommended at the state level stemming from the Summit on Immigrant Needs & Contributions included 1) permanent extension of CAPI and CFAP, 2) access to higher education for undocumented high school students, 3) access to driver licenses by the undocumented, and 4) public benefits that reflect the county cost of living.
- c. Immigrant Leadership Development.** Many counties have not provided different immigrant communities with leadership development opportunities. Immigrant leadership development is important to provide emerging immigrant groups with institutional access to power and resources, permit greater integration, and promote citizenship and voter registration. With institutional knowledge immigrants can serve on public commissions, non-profit boards, etc. and make a difference for their communities. Santa Clara County is studying the possibility of creating a Commission on the Status of Immigrants, modeled in part upon the San Francisco Immigrant Rights Commission, to enhance greater immigrant involvement and cross-cultural community building. Santa Clara County has provided \$25,000 in FY02 to develop an Immigrant Leadership Training Institute.
- d. Special Projects Based Upon the 17 Need Areas.** Each county possesses a unique demographic combination, with larger and smaller immigrant populations each with unique characteristics. The Summit on Immigrant Needs and Contributions of Santa Clara County was held on December 6, 2000. Beginning in January 2001 the need was felt to start implementing recommendations and the summit morphed into what is now called the Santa Clara County Immigrant Action Network (IAN), a composite of county, city, education, non-profit and community partners dedicated to implementing the recommendations from the summit. Five ongoing work teams (education, health, family support, economic

empowerment, and legal, encompassing the work groups in IB1, above) will continue to meet quarterly and together with IAN staff will work to implement the multi-faceted recommendations from the summit, a work plan for years to come. Examples of such special projects are the following:

- Establish an Immigrant Subcommittee of the Domestic Violence Council of Santa Clara County. Most of the recent deaths related to domestic violence in Santa Clara County have been immigrant deaths.
- Create a Public Defender position within the County's Public Defenders' Office to specialize in the immigration consequences of criminal pleas. Too many public defenders, criminal defense attorneys, district attorneys, and judges do not understand the devastating consequences of certain criminal pleas. For example, a misdemeanor domestic violence conviction can lead to the deportation of long-term permanent residents, leading to long-term family breakup and the need for welfare for US-born children. Santa Clara County established a full-time position for FY02.
- Pilot the "How to Live in America" course for first-time immigrant misdemeanants who need to understand their responsibilities, expected behaviors in the U.S., their rights, and the immigration consequences of their actions. This \$100 3-hour mandated course will be piloted in South County this fall.
- Enhance culturally proficient mental health delivery initially through continued assessment based on summit findings and enhanced knowledge of immigrant cultures. In July IAN staff participated in a statewide mental health conference for children and youth, presenting its findings related to the mental health needs of immigrant children.
- Improve immigration legal service funding and coordination.
- Improve immigrant access to housing opportunities. IAN staff is working to assure that housing-related information is readily accessible in multiple languages and information on how to create and retain credit is widely disseminated.

Accountability Mechanisms. It is critical to incorporate accountability mechanisms at every level of every program and policy. For example, with immigrant community education, pre and post-tests of what has been learned after a five-session module and the production of signatures of those receiving the information would be reasonable. In the area of translation of public documents, back-translating (e.g. translating from English to Russian, then from the Russian translation by a different translator to English, then comparing the two English versions independently) is one measure of accountability and an excellent developmental learning device.

Practical Suggestions for State Pilot Programs. Five specific recommendations are made regarding the creation of state pilot programs.

- In deciding which counties to establish pilot programs, select the top five counties with the highest number of immigrants and also the top five counties with the highest percentage of immigrants. These may overlap, which is fine. This will allow a diversity of pilot programs, meet the needs of the largest number of immigrants in the state, and gain valuable experience and best practices in coordinating services for immigrants in a meaningful way.
- Develop a pro-rata funding formula for these pilot counties based upon the number of immigrants in the county.
- Fund at a rate that allows meaningful county coordination and a needs assessment the first year, and meaningful county coordination and funding of programs or services the second year, in the range of \$300,000 to \$3,000,000 per county.
- Allow counties the latitude to decide how and where to best establish such county-level coordination bodies.
- Due to economies of scale in developing services, allow one or two counties to collaborate in regional delivery where geographic proximity makes sense. For the purpose of permanent programs, such multi-county collaboration may be extremely sensible.

California Office of Immigrant Affairs. *Create a California Office of Immigrant Affairs to coordinate and enhance state agency efforts to meet the needs of the State's immigrant population, assure and enforce language access, convene county and state agency best practices, and provide funding and technical assistance for county coordination and programs.*

Purposes. The main purposes of a California Office of Immigrant Affairs would be to

- Comply with state and federal laws and directives, such as compliance with the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) of Health and Human Services (HHS).
- Provide and enhance culturally competent services to immigrants in the State of California.

Six Goals of an Office of Immigrant Affairs. A California Office of Immigrant Affairs should have the following six goals as its mission.

Goal One: Coordinate County Efforts. Coordinate county efforts to assess and address the needs of immigrants, as outlined in Section One. Provide

- Funding
- Technical Assistance
- Research Assistance, where translation is a requirement, sensitivity to avoid stereotyping is essential, methodology must be rigid, and confidentiality is a necessity.

Goal Two: Convene and Showcase Best Practices. Convene and facilitate regional or statewide best practices conferences to provide the best ideas, programs, policies, and procedures to meet the needs of immigrants. Some best practices programs should be devoted to cultural proficiency training and how to best meet the needs of particular immigrant groups.

Goal Three: Oversee Immigrant-Related Data Collection. In order to meet immigrant needs, it is necessary to tailor programs and policies to specific immigrant communities with unique characteristics and backgrounds. Without data collection by country of origin and not just by ethnicity, preliterate Somali women are simply classified as “African American”, telling us nothing of their unique needs, and Laotians and Indo-Americans are treated equally (when actually their language needs, educational preparation, and occupational backgrounds may vary widely). It is therefore important to

- Require data collection by country of origin and language of preference in those state agencies serving immigrants
- Require such data collection as part of all state contracts serving people
- Enforce the above requirement for agencies and state contractors with sanctions

Goal Four: Require and Enforce Language Access. SB 987 represents a good beginning, but counties should be urged to go beyond its limits and address the needs of very needy immigrant populations. For example, even though Cambodians fall below the State threshold for translations, many Cambodians can barely navigate any written language much less English. Therefore the Social Services Agency of Santa Clara County provides written notices in Cambodian, irrespective of the lesser State mandate. It may be more feasible to convene a meeting of a local refugee community and explain eligibility requirements and expected outcomes orally, as has frequently occurred in the Somali community in Santa Clara County. When community participants in the Summit on Immigrant Needs and Contributions of Santa Clara County discussed thresholds for translating forms and notices, it became very difficult to argue that the county or any agency should look the other way and avoid real communication when **20 people** need that assistance.

Goal Five: Coordinate and Enhance State Agencies Working with Immigrants. Existing State offices, departments, and programs addressing refugees, migrant workers, permanent residents seeking citizenship, non-English speakers, a safety net for immigrants, special law enforcement issues, etc. all confront common issues regarding cultural proficiency, language access, translation accuracy, and efficiency in the delivery of services. There is a great need to avoid duplication and develop really targeted programs with maximum payback and effectiveness, such as in the area of English as a Second Language. In addition, certain agencies need language-capable staff to address immigrant-related issues, such as the Wesson bill to provide outreach and prosecute consumer fraud related to immigration consultants. A California Office of Immigrant Affairs could work over time to create

efficiencies and knowledge about immigrants in these state agencies, and enhance existing agencies where needs are clearly demonstrated.

Goal Six: Assess Statewide Effectiveness through Accountability Measures.

Accountability should permeate every program, every policy, every act of coordination. An important component of gauging effectiveness will be longitudinal research in state agencies and as part of community needs assessments in the 58 counties, perhaps every 3 or 4 years.

Lessons Learned from the Summit on Immigrant Needs & Contributions.

Many lessons were learned in the lengthy process leading up to the Summit on Immigrant Needs & Contributions of Santa Clara County. Below are some of the most quintessential.

Collaboration from the entire community is important. As part of the summit process, over 400 volunteers from county, city and state agencies as well as from businesses, unions, churches, non-profit agencies, and voluntary associations participated in 16 work groups for a period of a year and a half. These community experts helped design the surveys and focus group questions and provided valuable paid and unpaid workers who made a huge difference. Over 100 service learning students, interns, and community volunteers made phone calls in six languages to ask immigrants who were called from randomly generated lists to participate in a lengthy written survey.

Research is essential to identifying needs. Without adequate research into needs, no road map develops as to a precise work plan and plan of action to meet those needs. There is nothing worse than remedying imaginary needs.

Research methods must be diverse, comprehensive, and above all, completely sound. Methodological attack on immigrant studies proved to be a hot topic in the 1990s, when many immigrants were perceived as superfluous and “taking more than they receive”. In order to avoid these issues, Santa Clara County ultimately contracted with five Ph.D. researchers for different qualitative and quantitative methodological tasks and created a Research Advisory Council (RAC) of approximately 20 interested professors from San Jose State University, Santa Clara University, Stanford, and UC-Berkeley. Complementary research was important because unless and until findings and hypotheses were validated not only in written surveys but also verbally through focus groups or participatory action research, it was not deemed “worthy of a solution”, that is, developing recommendations to meet the need.

The contributions of immigrants are extremely significant. Originally only a needs assessment was planned in Santa Clara County. However, it became abundantly clear that only picturing immigrants as needy and not as contributing would leave a shipwrecked image instead of the image of a beautiful ocean liner, more than carrying its weight. Immigrants have made incredible and indelible

contributions to Santa Clara County and to the State of California. Without that perspective—contained within a 33-page section on contributions in all areas of life in Bridging Borders in Silicon Valley—certainly a mistaken image would emerge.

Research must be conducted in the language of the immigrant. How can you ask immigrants if they are receiving notices in an understandable language if you don't ask them in a language they understand? All 24 focus groups were conducted in the primary language and questionnaires were translated into 14 languages.

Immigrants were extremely cooperative. Immigrants were more than willing participants to be part of the study in Santa Clara County. Although the Human Relations Commission was invoked to do the asking for participation in the written survey, fearing retribution if the Social Services Agency was doing the asking, a very high return rate (10%) was achieved. Convincing some immigrants that confidentiality would follow from a government-conducted survey was at times difficult. However, immigrants were clearly thrilled that someone cared. One participant in Immigrants Building Community (participatory action research) commented to the facilitator in his own language: *"I can't believe the county has asked me to come here to give my opinion. No one has ever asked me for my opinion."*

A needs assessment and recommendations raises the level of understanding of policy makers, agencies, and the entire community. Without the research and focused attention, immigrants can remain invisible even when they constitute one-third of the county's population. The Summit on Immigrant Needs & Contributions placed immigrants at a level of importance that is now deservedly recognized.

The multi-topic, comprehensive approach fostered opportunities for collaboration not only of providers within the same need area, but also between providers of diverse need areas. Many isolated providers within the same area had never collaborated before, and the summit provided a springboard for common action *outside* the summit process. For example, immigration legal service providers rallied together to serve the community the best they could with multi-agency collaboration and a call for volunteers when then-President Clinton signed the LIFE Act on December 21, 2000. Similarly, specialists in the domestic violence community got to know the criminal justice community, ESL specialists better understood the importance of working with ancillary service providers like childcare, etc.

A special confluence of factors allowed the Summit on Immigrant Needs & Contributions to happen at all. The demographic shift in Santa Clara County (where 60% of the population is either immigrant or the US-born children of immigrants), the knowledge that many immigrants have special needs, a supportive Board of Supervisors and caring county administrators, community advocates, and the existence of county reserves allowed the summit to happen.

Immigrants really do possess significant needs and with special support can flourish as productive workers, integrated community members, well adjusted family members, and engaged citizens. We sometimes forget why we do the work we do. The quantitative survey from the summit acutely concluded that immigrants are two to three times more needy than the US-born in virtually every major need area examined. For example, there was a direct correlation in the area of English language achievement: the higher the level of English, the more personal income and fewer unsolvable problems. This correlation also held in general for the level of educational attainment. Immigrants and their US-born children, over two-fifths of California's population, are deserving of our attention and support on their way to engaged and productive lives.