



## **FOR AMERICA TO THRIVE:**

# *An Immigration 2020 Agenda*

June 2015





Irrefutable demographic changes are influencing the politics, policy and, fundamentally, the people of the United States of America. How policymakers, and their constituents, value immigrants and immigration to the nation will determine the competitiveness of our economy and the strength of our social fabric for generations to come.

The United States has two paths from which to choose. The first is a path of bitter polarization and deep divisions, breeding policies that socially and economically isolate America from the world. The second is a path of shared values leading to thriving Americans who have the opportunities, skills and status to reach their fullest potential.

The National Immigration Forum, with millions of aspiring Americans in mind, chooses the latter.

Through innovative organizing and strategic communications, the Forum has built coalitions of conservative and moderate faith leaders, law enforcement and business leaders constructively engaged in America's immigration debate — many for the first time.

As a result, the language and perspective of policymakers, and their constituents, changed.

In his 2014 State of the Union address, President Obama spoke of “the call of business leaders, labor leaders, faith leaders [and] law enforcement” supporting immigration reform. Republican leadership, as well as the rank and file, spoke to faith, security and prosperity as the values of immigrants and immigration. And, most important, public support reached new highs and opposition dropped to new lows among core conservative constituencies.

We learned that Americans of all political persuasions believe immigrants and immigration strengthen their communities. And their contributions are irrespective of the rancor and rhetoric of legislative and electoral campaigns.

Based on research and relationships, we also learned that new Americans are disproportionately represented in the nation's workforce, the majority of immigrants live in suburbs, and our children are growing up in communities more diverse than our parents ever imagined

Americans see these changes every day and understand their importance through the voices of those they trust.

Therefore, based on the input and guidance of trusted faith, law enforcement, education, community and business leaders, we are proud to announce the *Immigration 2020* Agenda.

This is merely the beginning.



From here, we will work with the *Immigration 2020* Leadership Council and others to develop research, sharpen a narrative and advance local and national public policies that ensure America thrives because new Americans have the opportunities, skills and status to reach their fullest potential.

## **THE IMMIGRATION 2020 AGENDA**

While they may have left loved ones and cherished places, aspiring Americans bring all they know and understand to the United States. It is a journey nearly all of our ancestors took; it is a journey that makes America exceptional. But today, it is a journey with higher risks for the individual, greater challenges for our institutions and higher stakes for our economy.

**By 2020, America needs:**

### **1 A 21<sup>st</sup>-CENTURY IMMIGRATION SYSTEM**

Our current immigration system fails to meet the needs of the nation's economy, workforce and families. Congress and the administration must work together to build a 21st-century immigration system that advances the social and economic interests of all Americans.

An immigration system that helps America prosper strikes the right balance between interior enforcement and border security, earned legalization and a path to citizenship, and family and employer immigration. Unauthorized status is the greatest barrier to immigrants reaching their fullest potential. It minimizes their economic contributions, distracts valuable law enforcement resources and weakens our global competitiveness. To maintain the U.S.'s position as a leader both economically and politically in the world, we must build our own skills and win the global competition for talent.

### **2 THE SKILLS AND TRAINING TO THRIVE**

In 2014, 39 percent of U.S. employers reported difficulty filling jobs due to lack of available talent.<sup>1</sup> Employers and employees agree that everyone in the labor force needs access to the appropriate knowledge and skills — whether basic, middle, or high — to fill economic needs, which also helps individuals achieve their own career goals.

Innovative public-private partnerships and other programs that engage businesses, colleges and universities, faith-based institutions and community-based organizations can make necessary strategic investments in education and training to help immigrants reach their fullest potential. New Americans with the skills for the jobs of today and the economy of tomorrow contribute to a globally competitive workforce.

### 3 LANGUAGE LEARNING FOR A GLOBAL SOCIETY

Learning English remains an important tool for immigrants to gain the opportunities to reach their fullest potential and contribute fully to the nation. Almost a quarter of the world's population speaks English (about 1.75 billion people).<sup>2</sup> And, in the United States, too many individuals are on waiting lists for classes to learn English. In addition, native-born Americans — young and old — are beginning to see the benefits of their own multilingualism as our economy and workforce are increasingly global. More and more schools offer language classes, and adults seek their own training opportunities in a range of languages.

Contextualized English-language learning has emerged as a crucial opportunity for immigrants in the workforce. Crafting effective public-private partnerships and other programs to offer these learning opportunities builds skills, increases productivity and allows people to enhance their own earning potential, all of which boost our economy. Moreover, in a rapidly globalizing environment, multilingual abilities are a competitive advantage for individuals and for businesses competing domestically and internationally.

### 4 AN ACTIVE AND VIBRANT CITIZENRY

Today, an estimated 8.8 million people are eligible to naturalize, yet only a small percentage of them naturalize each year.<sup>3</sup> Barriers to naturalization include financial challenges, language barriers and lack of understanding of the naturalization process.

By promoting naturalization, we develop a diverse citizenry fully invested in and contributing to all aspects of civic and economic life in the U.S. In addition to the role of the nongovernmental sector, private interests, faith-based organizations and strong relationships with law enforcement are critical to a more vibrant citizenry. Of course, good government means continued improvement of the immigration and naturalization process so the best and the brightest new Americans contribute to our economy and unite with their families.

### 5 OPPORTUNITIES IN THE HANDS OF STRIVING AMERICANS

“The interaction of disparate cultures, the vehemence of the ideals that led the immigrants here, the opportunity offered by a new life, all gave America a flavor and a character that make it as unmistakable and as remarkable to people today as it was to Alexis de Tocqueville,” Sen. John F. Kennedy wrote in 1958. With greater levels of diversity than ever, America is building on that history as it also nears President Ronald Reagan's 1989 vision of a [Shining City on a Hill](#), “teeming with people of all kinds living in harmony and peace.” With the opportunities that arise from the contributions of aspiring Americans come 21st century challenges facing our public and private institutions.

Whether they are school systems engaging immigrant parents, local governments sparking immigrant entrepreneurship, or education institutions providing training and facilitating accreditation, our national interest is bound up in the unrealized capital of new Americans. Public-private policies, programs and partnerships that unleash this capital will serve our national interests for generations to come.

## NOTES

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1 Manpower Group, 2014 Talent Shortage Survey Infographic, [http://www.manpowergroup.us/campaigns/talent-shortage-2014/assets/pdf/MPG\\_US\\_TalentShortagVertInfogrphcFINAL.pdf](http://www.manpowergroup.us/campaigns/talent-shortage-2014/assets/pdf/MPG_US_TalentShortagVertInfogrphcFINAL.pdf)

2 British Council, The English Effect, 2013, p. 5: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/publications/the-english-effect>

3 Nancy Rytina, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Estimates of the Legal Permanent Resident Population in 2012, July 2013, p. 1: [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/ois\\_lpr\\_pe\\_2012.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/ois_lpr_pe_2012.pdf)