LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT CIVIC PARTICIPATION AMONG IMMIGRANTS

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PREFACE

This document is based on information collected through the Civic Participation Initiative sponsored by the Washington Area Partnership for Immigrants (WAPI). The Association for the Study and Development of Community (ASDC) managed and facilitated the activities that were part of the Civic Participation Initiative, and would like to thank WAPI's Civic Participation Subcommittee (Sally Rudney, Margaret Siegel, Claudia Kieffer, and Alison McWilliams) and staff of the Community Foundation for the National Capital Region (Kathy Whelpley, Tom Kam, and Lee Christian Parker) for their guidance and leadership. Funds from the Public Interest Projects also supported the literature review and data collection for this document. ASDC would also like to thank members of the Immigrant Empowerment Council who participated and contributed to the information contained in this document. David Chavis served as the Project Director with support from Kien Lee, Maxine Carpenter, and Stephen Ramos. Channapha Khamvongsa assisted in the literature review.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The immigrant population in the United States is increasing daily, and the Washington, D.C., area is no exception to this trend. A study by the Brookings Institution revealed that by 1998, the Washington metropolitan area had become the fifth most common destination for immigrants from all over the world (Singer et al., 2001). With such a high influx of newcomers into the area comes a range of challenges for local governments and neighborhoods. One of these challenges is how to engage immigrants, naturalized and otherwise, in institutions and processes (e.g., schools, neighborhood associations, county meetings) that affect their lives as well as those of long-time residents of the area.

Many of the activities designed to support new immigrants focus on citizenship and voter registration (c.f., Cho, 1999; Gregson, 1997; Lien, 1997; Verba & Nie, 1987). This approach has at least two major disadvantages: (1) it excludes permanent residents who cannot vote but who can participate in community activities in other ways; (2) it limits the concept of civic participation to taking part in political activity and thereby diminishes the importance of participation in local and neighborhood activities, which are typically more viable for most immigrants than is action on the state or national level.

Between 1997 and 2000, the Washington Area Partnership for Immigrants (WAPI) provided funding to community organizations in the metropolitan area to increase the rate of citizenship among immigrants. One lesson learned from this effort was that the citizenship process does not end with naturalization; organizations need further support to help immigrants understand their responsibilities and rights as residents and citizens of the United States. As far as WAPI and the Association for the Study and Development of Community (ASDC) knew, there had been no region-wide effort to learn about issues related to civic participation among immigrants; hence, the Civic Participation Initiative ("the Initiative") was launched.

The goals of the Initiative were to:

- Convene a group of civic leaders from diverse immigrant communities to participate in a series of learning circles to exchange knowledge about civic participation and help set future directions for supporting civic participation efforts in the metropolitan area;

- Facilitate linkages between the largest and smallest organizing, advocacy, and action efforts in the area, and begin a regional movement around civic participation led by immigrant leaders;

- Provide an opportunity for immigrant leaders to inform leaders of established institutions about how to engage newcomers, and help influence and develop resources for increasing civic participation; and

- Provide an opportunity to learn about other community organizing and advocacy efforts in the region and around the country (e.g., through invited speakers and site visits).

The goals were implemented through a series of learning circle meetings. A total of 25 immigrant leaders were invited to participate in the learning circles; participants were chosen on the basis of their leadership, knowledge, and credibility; the constituencies that their association or organization served; their interest in retaining their cultural traditions while integrating members of their communities into the larger society; and their commitment to working with others to strengthen their communities. Of the 25 invitees, 17 participated in the entire process. They have origins in 13 countries and represent different types of organizations (e.g., associations, religious institutions, volunteer groups, and coalitions). At the learning circles, participants were encouraged to share and learn about the traditions and practices of civic participation in their communities.

This document serves two purposes:

- To share lessons learned about civic participation from the perspectives of immigrant leaders and about the learning circle process; and
- To summarize the implications of the lessons learned for future civic participation efforts.

The civic cultures selected for inclusion in this document were those of the learning circle participants. Participants' knowledge and experiences were supplemented by information drawn from the social science literature and by reports about immigrants and civic participation, as well as by interviews with other immigrant leaders. This document is not intended to provide step-by-step instructions for designing, implementing, and facilitating an initiative to learn about civic participation. Process information (e.g., design of meetings, facilitation skills) is included only when it is directly related to issue of civic participation.

2. OUTREACH AND CONVENING OF IMMIGRANT CIVIC LEADERS

2.1 Identifying And Engaging The Immigrant Civic Leaders Who Could Contribute The Most To And Gain And Share The Most From The Process

Two ASDC staff members reached out to immigrant communities in the Washington metropolitan region in order to identify the appropriate civic leaders to engage in the Initiative. Using a "snowball" strategy, the staff asked each person contacted to suggest names of additional people who should be engaged in the Initiative, on the basis of a set of desired characteristics.[1] According to these characteristics, the participating leaders should:

- Understand the need for immigrants to participate in civic matters;
- Be able to focus on building immigrants' capacity for civic participation and not just on their immediate needs (e.g., housing, employment, English language skills);
- Be committed to working across cultures to work toward a common goal;
- Have credibility among a group of people from within their own communities; and
- Be available to participate in a series of meetings.

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[1] The snowball sampling method is commonly used in qualitative research (Mertens, 1998).

One of the Initiative's assumptions was that there is no single definition of leadership among immigrants. The staff paid close attention to all possible forms of leadership--for example, the educated individual to whom group members go for informal advice and help, the spiritual leader, and the business owner.

The staff drew on the following resources for identifying immigrants to contact:

- Immigrants who were known to WAPI's Steering Committee[2] (e.g., past and current grantees);
- Executive directors of well-known organizations that serve newcomers;
- Editors and columnists of ethnic newspapers;
- Owners of neighborhood restaurants; and
- Lists of national associations and their local affiliates, if any (e.g., Korean American Coalition, Trinidad and Tobago Association).

The potential participants were asked about their concept of civic participation and their ideas for how the Initiative could be structured to maximize its potential. They were also asked to describe any civic participation activities that they were currently conducting and to identify other leaders to whom members of their community turn for assistance or advice. After two months, ASDC staff had spoken to or met with approximately 100 immigrant leaders and individuals who were concerned with the inclusion of immigrants in civic affairs.

2.2 Strategy Sessions

ASDC conducted strategy sessions in the District of Columbia, Northern Virginia, and suburban Maryland to introduce the Initiative and to seek input from immigrant leaders and other individuals. Individuals who had been contacted by staff were invited to attend the sessions. One of the goals of these sessions was to identify key issues that affect immigrants across groups and jurisdictions in the Washington metropolitan region and the leaders associated with each issue. During the sessions, the findings from the staff's interviews and a list of individuals who had been contacted were distributed. Additional names were generated by participants.

Twenty-six people attended the strategy sessions. The discussions resulted in the following points:

- This was the first time that the different leadership (e.g., civic leaders, informal leaders, bridge builders, funders, and public representatives from the community and WAPI) concerned with immigration and issues facing immigrants had been brought together to discuss their work and the meaning of civic participation to immigrants. The participants were aware of the various types of civic participation efforts, both large and small, in the Washington metropolitan area; however, there appeared to be no systematic coordination, inventory, networking, or information and resource sharing occurring among these efforts.

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[2] The Steering Committee is comprised of funders and public representatives of local governments in the District of Columbia, Northern Virginia, and suburban Maryland.

- Even though the issues faced by immigrants are not the same across immigrant groups and across regions (i.e., Montgomery County in Maryland, the District of Columbia, Arlington and Fairfax Counties in Virginia), a regional approach would be beneficial.
- A two-way information exchange is essential. Immigrants need to learn about systems in the United States and to understand the responsibilities of citizenship; at the same time, Americans need to learn about the traditions of immigrants and be more sensitive to their challenges.
- Even though each immigrant group may perceive an issue through a different lens, there was strong desire among some participants to examine common concerns from different corners and cultural contexts and to identify ways to build on their cultural assets to collectively address the common concerns.
- The participants expressed an interest in learning about effective models for civic participation and finding ways to integrate promising strategies into existing efforts.

This information reaffirmed the importance of the Initiative and reflected the consensus needed to move forward.

2.3 Learning Circle Participants

Of the approximately 100 immigrant leaders contacted by ASDC staff, 25 were invited to participate in the Initiative's learning circles. This final selection was based on each of the potential participant's interest, time, and commitment. ASDC initially planned for six meetings from December 2000 until June 2001; however, as the participants approached the end of the process, they decided to continue to meet because 1) no consensus had been achieved regarding the best way to use the $40,000 grant that WAPI had allocated for increasing civic participation among immigrants, 2) they agreed on the importance of establishing a regional organization committed to civic issues that affect immigrants. A total of 17 leaders remained consistently involved in the entire process, which lasted eight months (one meeting every month). The participants who attended at least half the number of meetings received a stipend. After the eighth meeting, the participants' focus on civic participation shifted to the possible structures of the organization they planned on establishing (further information about the establishment of the organization is included in Section 7).

For almost all the participants, the importance of the civic participation and the opportunities for relationship building were the primary incentives for their attendance and participation in the required meetings. The stipend was a secondary incentive. With the exception of one person, none of the participants asked about the stipend even after the sixth meeting. One participant declined the stipend and two participants requested that the stipends be directed towards their organizations. Several participants mentioned their thanks for the stipend because, in their opinion, it was an indication of respect and appreciation of their time and contributions.

2.4 Lessons Learned

Staff capacity. Both ASDC staff members who conducted the outreach had immigrant experiences—one member is from Southeast Asia, and the parents of the other were from Latin America. Their ability to relate to the immigrant experience, to speak multiple languages, and to empathize with the challenges that the leaders face enabled them to build good rapport with the people they spoke to and, to some extent, had an positive effect on their ability to engage immigrant leaders from South and Central America and Asia.

The staff also had to be sensitive to and knowledgeable about the politics of immigrant communities, which are often transferred from their countries of origin, and result in turf issues and intragroup tensions within a particular community. Staff could understandably not be totally familiar with the politics of all the immigrant communities. When in doubt, they found it useful to acknowledge ignorance, display humility, respect the influence of each leader, and ask to be educated.

In addition to the outreach and planning of learning circle meetings, one staff person was responsible for meeting facilitation and another person for documentation and summary. A senior staff person at ASDC oversaw the project and process. The ethnicity of the facilitator (who happened to be African American in this case) appeared to be less important than the person's ability and style to manage the process. There was a turnover in the facilitator after the sixth meeting, which affected the continuity of the process, though not to the extent of being disruptive.

The staff spent time before each meeting developing the agenda and preparing for any potential conflict that might arise during the meeting. They debriefed after each meeting and strategized on how to build on the information provided at the previous meeting in subsequent discussions. The staff members had complementary knowledge and skills and combined, they were able to address questions and issues related to immigrants, community organizing, group processes, and information gathering.

After the third meeting, the evaluator for WAPI[3] checked in with each learning circle participant about the progress and affects of the learning circle process. The check-in provided a process independent from the learning circle meetings for collecting information about the strengths, challenges, and concerns of the Initiative. The responses were summarized and shared with the staff to inform any necessary mid course adjustments. The findings indicated that the participants appreciated the learning process which gave them the opportunity to learn more other cultures and the activities of other immigrant groups in the region. They were also challenged by the amount of time it took to participate in the process and the difficulties in balancing the priorities of those who were interested in relationship building and others who were wanted to see tangible action by the group.

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[3] ASDC also served as the evaluator of WAPI. This was not a conflict of interest nor a challenge to ASDC because 1) the evaluation was primarily focused on lessons learned regarding the learning circle process and improvements that needed to be made to the process, and 2) a staff person who was not involved in the Civic Participation Initiative conducted the check-ins.

Range of immigrant leaders. The backgrounds of the immigrant leaders varied enormously. They included the executive director of the only community center that serves a particular group of immigrants, an officer of a civic association, the president of an immigrant coalition, or an informal leader from a well-respected family in his or her country of origin. This wide range of leaders also meant a variety of capacities (knowledge, skills, experiences, and relationships) and intragroup affiliations (e.g., political parties, ancestry, and length of residence in the United States), all of which had to be considered in the planning of the Initiative.

In more established and large immigrant communities in the Washington metropolitan area, such as the Chinese and Korean communities, there are many types of membership associations and civic organizations (e.g., Chinese American Retirement Enterprise, Organization for Chinese Americans, DC Chinatown Merchant Association, Chinese Republican Association, Korean American Democratic Association, Korean Republican, Korean Association of Metropolitan Maryland, and Korean American Grocers' Association), but fewer service providers (the Chinese Culture and Community Service Center and the Korean Community Service Center are the major service providers for Chinese and Korean immigrants, respectively). The pool of potential leaders to engage from these communities is large and diverse. In the smaller and newer immigrant communities, such as the Central American, Southeast Asian, Central Asian, and Middle Eastern communities, service providers dominate the support system (e.g., Indochinese Community Center, Boat People SOS, and American Kurdish Center, Association of Salvadorian Americans of Northern Virginia). The pool of leaders from these communities is more limited and less diverse. In addition to these organizations, there are coalitions in some communities that can provide a single point of contact to a large number of organizations. In the Washington metropolitan area, these coalitions include the Lao Community Forum, the Council of Latino Agencies, and the Coalition of Hispanic Agencies and Professionals.

Patience, time, and flexibility. The outreach process took time, patience, and flexibility. Referrals were made by word of mouth, and some leaders could be contacted only at a certain time during the day. There were also tensions between leaders of some groups; in such cases, in order not to appear biased or exclusive and thereby harm the process, staff had to meet with all the leaders and to be extraordinarily cautious about not sharing comments made by other interviewees. Even when a leader was known to be overextended or, perhaps, not to be the appropriate person for the Initiative, ASDC staff took the time to inform him or her about the effort and solicit his or her ideas. This gesture demonstrated the staff and funders' respect for the person and, at the same time, ensured the leader's blessing to engage his/her community with the cooperation of another leader. It took two months for the staff to contact approximately 100 leaders, of which 30 were interviewed in person.

Not every learning circle participant attended every meeting for various reasons. Staff had to spend time in between meetings updating individuals who missed them in order to avoid duplication or reiteration of information at the next meeting. The learning circle group established a ground rule that if anyone missed more than three meetings, they were not allowed to continue their participation. This was important to the group because if someone missed more than three meetings, he/she would have difficulty catching up with the group's knowledge and

progress. It also meant that discussions would be repeated, which was unfair to the rest of the group due to time constraints.

The group also agreed to a ground rule that new members should not be introduced after the third meeting without prior notice to ASDC or the group. Again, this ground rule was established to avoid repeated discussions after another new member joins the learning circle. Nevertheless, two new members joined the group after the sixth meeting. Their contributions were valued because their culture and nationality were not represented in the circle. ASDC staff shared the summaries of previous meetings with the two new members and provided them a historical account of the process in order to bring them up to date with the learning and relationship building that had already occurred. Except for this extra effort and a small amount of time spent at meetings to remind the new members of the ground rules, the new members' presence did not have a negative impact on the process.

Shifting the grantee-funder paradigm. It was difficult to shift the traditional grantee-funder paradigm, under which grantees expect the funder to set the ground rules for their relationship. During the one-on-one interviews and strategy sessions, respondents expected to be told the goals, process, and expected outcomes for the Initiative. They were surprised to learn that the Initiative did not have a prescribed process, even though it did have a goal and a general direction. The benefit of the Initiative's open-endedness and the funders' egalitarian style had to be made clear in the beginning of every discussion. Once the respondents understood the advantages of this paradigm, they were generally receptive to the Initiative.

3. MEANING OF CIVIC PARTICIPATION

3.1 Existing Research about the Meaning of Civic Participation among Immigrants

A review of the literature about civic participation provided the following insights:

- Political participation is often discussed in the context of voting. Since only naturalized citizens can vote, most research focuses on new Americans rather than on immigrants who have not become U.S. citizens;
- The concept of civic participation had to be broadened to include transnational communities, social capital, social organization, and community organizing in ethnic-specific populations in order to capture a clearer understanding of the issue as it relates to immigrants; and
- Most research addresses the reasons for lack of participation, barriers to participation, and predictors of participation; it does not focus on effective models and programs of civic participation.

In addition to its obvious link to engagement in the political process, civic participation can take on a variety of other meanings. Thomson (1987) provides a framework for thinking about the meaning of civic participation in terms of *input* and *output* into a participation system. At the input side, community members have to have equal opportunity and access to planning

and decision-making processes at all levels. Their participation, it is hoped, will result in the enactment of policies that meet their needs and interests and an improved ability to interact with government institutions and influence decisions (outputs). Within this framework, there is a wide range of ways in which immigrants may participate in civic life. The method of participation depends on a variety of factors, including their civic traditions, political structures in their countries of origin, and current capacity in the United States.

3.2 Civic Participation, According to Immigrant Leaders

A total of eight learning circle meetings were held. The first two meetings focused on understanding the ways in which immigrants define and participate in civic life and on the issues that support or challenge their participation. The following questions were discussed:

- What is the meaning of civic participation in your culture?
- How is civic participation in your culture different from or similar to what is expected in this country?
- What values, norms of behavior, or beliefs form the foundation or barriers for civic participation in your culture?

The discussions revealed that different cultures have their own understanding about civic participation. Among Chinese immigrants, civic participation means taking care of one's family. The Chinese believe that taking care of family is a contribution to civic welfare, because healthy families lead to a healthy society (National Commission on Civic Renewal, Panel 3). This belief is based on Confucian values, which emphasize filial piety. This tradition is also reflected in the fact that the Chinese consider their leaders as "fathers" of their communities. In Vietnam during the monarchy and French occupation, civic participation at the national level was not allowed. The Vietnamese participated in civic affairs only in their villages, by assisting in efforts to deal with natural disasters and other misfortunes. Under the republic regime, civic participation grew bolder and came to include participation in national elections, strikes, or other political demonstrations. From a Cambodian community leader's perspective, civic participation in Cambodia began in the 1940s, when people were allowed to participate in elections.

In Korea, citizens participate at the regional or province level. Participation is solicited after some form of public proclamation that legitimizes the need for citizen input has been made. This approach contrasts with that in the United States, where participation in neighborhood processes (e.g., in neighborhood or tenant organization) is valued as much as is participation at the national level.

Latinos, according to the learning circle participants from Central and South America, consider involvement in demonstrations and strikes as civic participation. Some even considered participation in civil wars as civic action. Due to class issues, only the upper class in Latin America is involved in politics. Anyone else who became politically involved would jeopardize his or her economic status. In Central America (e.g., El Salvador and Guatemala), "top-down" governing structures that included repressive military and security forces widen the chasm between local and national decision-making processes, thereby preventing citizen participation.

In Bolivia, for example, participating in parades that celebrate the government is considered civic action. In general, civic participation among citizens in Latin American countries at the local level tend to occur through informal methods.

Political participation in the Caribbean community is heavily encouraged, according to the Caribbean participants in the learning circle. Other forms of civic participation include keeping the physical environment of their communities clean, helping their neighbors, and celebrating traditions. Among ethnic groups that have been extensively oppressed, such as Russian Jews, the inclination is not to participate, because participation might land a person in trouble with the authorities or, at best, not make any difference. According to several people who work with this community, including a Russian Jewish social worker, it is extremely difficult to involve their members in any effort related to political participation (e.g., voting) or charity.

In Sudan, civic participation means taking care of local needs that are not addressed by the government. For example, in the 1940s, citizens collected money to construct the Ahaalia schools so that everyone could obtain an education. Funds raised in this way are also used to help build small bridges and roads and to clean their towns. A tradition in the Sudanese culture, called *nafwer*, teaches citizens that if they want to help somebody, they should gather a group of people and help that person. This tradition is practiced, for example, during weddings and funerals. These forms of participation are limited to the person's ethnic community. At the government level, civic participation occurs through trade unions and political parties.

Civic participation in Iran occurs through informal networks of family and friends. It is initiated in response to a problem or issue. Compared to civic participation in the United States, it is an ad-hoc process that is not defined in any particular way.

Information such as the above make it clear that immigrants' concept of civic participation is different from that of political and electoral participation, which tends to be the focus of civic engagement programs and research. The information provides a historical context for and sheds light on an immigrant group's understanding about civic participation in the United States. The immigrants' civic traditions result in a layer of structures that they developed to serve as a bridge between their private and the public spheres. These structures are not always apparent and are not easily accessible to nonmembers. Therefore, in order to address civic participation among immigrants, we need to understand how immigrants are organized, the functions of their organizations, and the ways in which they operate.

3.3 Lessons Learned

The need to link culture, migration patterns, and political history to civic participation. The attitudes of immigrants toward civic participation is shaped by their cultural traditions, migration patterns, and the political context of their countries of origin (c.f. Hamilton & Chinchilla, 2001). Few studies and civic participation projects intentionally link culture to civic participation; consequently, it has been challenging for advocates to change the behaviors of immigrants and to increase their participation at the local and national levels and across institutions. Efforts to increase civic involvement have typically focused on political participation. The New York Immigrant Coalition, for instance, registered 175,000 voters in

2000. Efforts to increase the involvement of immigrants in schools, neighborhood or block associations, and community building projects have been less successful because (1) they have not been able to help immigrants make the connection between their participation in these institutions and political power, and (2) they have not helped immigrants link these institutions to their corresponding structures in their countries of origin (e.g., family- or clan-based associations in China, construction of small bridges in Sudan).

Participation of immigrants in their own communities. The definition of civic participation has to be made clear. According to the definitions used by the immigrant leaders, members of their communities are participating in civic matters within their own groups, but not in mainstream American affairs and institutions. For example, helping one's neighbor is considered civic participation. Immigrants participate through their own traditional social organization[4] and the structures (e.g., informal and formal organizations) that support the organization. These forms of organization and structure may or may not be compatible to mainstream norms and values in the United States. Where there is compatibility, it is easier to attract immigrants to participate in the mainstream civic institutions. Where there is no compatibility, it is essential to build on the traditional organization and structures rather than impose new and familiar ideas.

Immigrant and mainstream American civic structures overlap. The structures utilized by immigrants and mainstream American communities to support civic engagement overlap at times. For example, some immigrants use public school facilities to conduct their cultural and language programs, which may or may not be open to members outside of their community. The theories of cultural pluralists, pro-assimilation theorists, and integrationists[5] have not fully recognized this overlap which increases the likelihood for interaction between immigrant and mainstream leaders and institutions. Likewise, these theorists have not demonstrated how we can take advantage of this overlay to increase the participation of immigrants in mainstream American institutions. This lesson suggests also that the areas of overlay will become denser as the number and diversity of immigrants increase and their civic structures multiply and expand, which further emphasizes the need for more knowledge and a focus on the link between culture and civic participation. Finally, an immigrant group's movement toward more participation in mainstream American institutions cannot be thought of as a linear or an either-or process. It is a gradual process and immigrants can participate at different levels to varying extent depending on their degree of integration into their new home (c.f. Portes & Zhou, 1994).

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[4] Social organization is defined as a network of relationships that preserve the community's cultural traditions and values.

[5] These terms have specific meanings among theorists and practitioners in the immigration field. Cultural pluralists expect to maintain the cultural traditions and values of an immigrant group and, at the same time, expect the group's members to cooperate with other groups at the political, economic, and civic levels (Gordon, 1964). "Assimilation" meant that immigrants should learn English, adopt America's democratic and egalitarian principles, and live by a set of ethics that require them to become fully "Americanized" (Salins, 1997). The integration model is grounded on a more gradual, mutual, and natural process of adaptation between immigrants and the American society (Fix & Zimmerman, 2000).

4. SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES

It is critical to appreciate the social organization of immigrant communities in order to understand the structures through which they participate. The organization may imitate that of an immigrant community's country of origin; more likely than not, however, it is a hybrid structure that builds on the traditions of their homeland and has been adapted to fit the "American way." The social organization of an immigrant community becomes a way in which members provide support to and obtain assistance from each other, share information, and contribute to larger society. These structures that maintain the social organization are influenced by factors such as the characteristics of the different waves of immigrants (e.g., education, gender, age), the political context of their country of origin (e.g., civil war, natural disaster), the political and social climate in the U.S. cities that received the immigrants (e.g., Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants arrived in Los Angeles when the anti-immigrant sentiment was high in the U.S.; see Hamilton & Chinchilla, 2001), and the availability of already established networks to welcome and support newly arrived immigrants. These structures become the immigrants' avenues for participation.

These structures are unique to each immigrant group and its culture; they may or may not interact with those of mainstream America. However, one cannot simply ask an immigrant, "What is the civic structure of your community?" or "What is the structure for civic participation?" Instead, during the third and fourth meetings, participants of the learning circle discussed how their communities mobilize and organize to help their members. The information also provided insights into the functions of particular organizations in immigrant communities. ASDC invited speakers from the National Salvadoran Network, Korean American Coalition, and the National Federation of Filipino American Associations to share information about their communities organized themselves to participate in local and national civic affairs.

4.1 Structures for Participation

Structures that preserve culture and language. Immigrants from countries with a history of oppression tend not to participate in political activities. In Latin America, China, and Vietnam, participation in political activities has historically been limited to the wealthy citizens. Citizens of the former Soviet Union, especially Russian Jews, believed that their votes made no difference; consequently, this group of immigrants views any form of political participation as a waste of time. Sudanese immigrants fled their country with negative impressions of the government they left behind; as a result, they do not attempt to get involved in the government in the United States. In communities characterized by such distrust, according to leaders and service providers of immigrants from such nations, the most effective way to mobilize the members is through cultural and social issues. Cultural and social events also serve another function. For an immigrant community divided by political, religious, or tribal affiliation, cultural activities become the neutralizer. The Sudanese Community Center, the Nepalese Education and Cultural Center, and the House of Iran are examples of culturally oriented structures in the Washington metropolitan area.

Another major structure for participation focuses on the psychological need among recent immigrants to retain their cultural traditions. Chinese immigrant parents are particularly

concerned that their children will be unable to speak, write, or read Mandarin. They send their children to language classes to learn not only Mandarin but also the moral values of their heritage. These classes may be conducted at community centers or, if such centers do not exist, at local schools on weekends. This form of participation exemplifies the Chinese civic tradition of taking care of their families by ensuring that their values are passed on to the next generation. The Chinese Language School and the India School Programs in Montgomery County are examples of such a structure.

Structures that build on religion and spirituality. Faith-based and spiritual institutions have different functions in different immigrant communities. In Latino communities, the church plays a very important role in organizing and supporting its members, politically and socially. Latino pastors are more inclined than are ministers from other ethnic groups to help deliver messages about community development issues. A member of the learning circle pointed out the astonishing speed and effectiveness by which the Salvadorian community raised money for earthquake victims in their country of origin through religious networks. Churches also provide a way for Latino immigrants to stay informed about activities in their countries of origin. In transnational communities,[6] such knowledge is very important to them (Hamilton & Chinchilla, 2001; Levitt, 1999). St. Anthony's Church in Northern Virginia is an example of such an institution.

Korean, Vietnamese, and Chinese churches and temples, on the other hand, do not have strong political functions. Neither do mosques. Korean churches serve their members socially by providing a structure and process for fellowship and sense of belonging, maintenance of ethnic identity and native traditions, social services, and social status (Min, 2000). Korean pastors consider their churches as sanctuaries for their members and do not wish to burden them with messages related to political or economic issues. Instead, they focus on providing counseling and educational services to Korean families as well as clerical and lay positions for church members. These positions are considered with high regard by Korean immigrants (Min, 2000).

Structures that address professional and other specific concerns. National organizations with special concerns have become powerful forces in linking immigrants to mainstream American institutions. These organizations provided one of the first ways through which ASDC staff identified immigrant leaders and potential learning circle participants. Such organizations include the National Coalition on Caribbean Affairs, Trinidad and Tobago Association, Taiwanese Benevolent Association, Vietnamese Senior Citizens Association, Chinese American Retirement Enterprise, Korean American Democratic Association, Lao American Women Association, and Russian American Association. These organizations were not always easy to identify; it was through contact with individuals from the ethnic groups they represented that ASDC staff were able to contact their officers.

In addition to these organizations, all of which are located in the Washington metropolitan region, are national groups headquartered elsewhere; these include the American Physicians of Indian Origin, Japanese American Citizens League, National Association of Latino

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[6] "Transnational communities" are groups formed by significant numbers of immigrants from the same area who settle near one another in the United States and are united by their sense of attachment to their place or country of origin (Levitt, 1999).

Elected and Appointed Officials Education Fund, Mexican-American Legal Defense Fund, and the National Asian Pacific Center on Aging. These organizations play a more extensive role than faith-based institutions, community centers, or cultural programs do in bridging immigrant traditions with mainstream American institutions and values. Hamilton & Chinchilla (2001) suggested that such national advocacy organizations are likely to form after immigrant communities have been established long enough to be less concerned about their members' immediate needs and can begin to look forward to a permanent existence in the United States.

Structures for mass communication. Ethnic media provide another means to support the social organization of immigrant communities, primarily because the communication is conducted in the immigrants' native languages. Throughout history, Asians have used the media to communicate information on homeland politics (e.g., Radio-Free Asia in Washington, D.C.). Asian media also help maintain community attachment, promote acculturation, raise group consciousness, and mobilize political participation (Lien, 1997). Ethnic newspapers are easily available at grocery stores and restaurants, and information about radio and television stations that serve immigrants can be obtained on local access stations. Examples of popular ethnic newspapers in the Washington metropolitan region include *Asian Fortune, El Pregonero,* and *Iranian News.* These sources are useful for identifying immigrant leaders and gathering points for their members (e.g., annual events, community centers, grocery stores). Ethnic television and radio stations in the local area include Radio Free Asia, Univision Television channels 30 and 48, Darshan Television Productions, and Radio America.

Structures for integration. Another form of organization is a program whose purpose is to help immigrants integrate into their new society, such as English as a Second Language classes (ESL) and citizenship workshops. These programs often attract large numbers of immigrants, particularly recent newcomers and provide another way to reach them. A majority of these programs are conducted on weekends and evenings. Even though their primary intent is to teach new immigrants how to function biculturally, they can also become social support systems. According to some of the learning circle participants, many ESL students have been known to continue attending classes even after they had graduated because they provide an opportunity to socialize with their own members. Traditional food can be served to attract the adults and to create an environment where immigrants can socialize in a familiar setting. In Arlington, Virginia, the Bolivian community has its own Saturday school, which teaches Spanish to the children and English to the adults.

Structures that build on economic concerns. There are many organizations that help immigrants become self-employed, understand the law pertaining to business ownership, and ensure equal treatment by employers. Such organizations are likely to exist when there is a cluster of ethnic businesses in a particular area, for example in Chinatown in the District of Columbia or in Eden Center, a Vietnamese shopping center in Northern Virginia. The Korean American Drycleaners Association and the Chinatown Merchant Association are examples of such civic structures. Ethnic banks and credit unions (Chinatrust Bank and the Lee Family Credit Union) exist to assist immigrants obtain loans to start their own businesses. These financial institutions are able to conduct their business transactions in their native language and as such, tend to attract primarily members of their communities. There are also informal lending networks in Chinese, Indian, and Caribbean communities where funds are pooled from members and

redistributed as loans to recent newcomers. Once the newcomers are able, they in turn contribute to the pool and the cycle of lending continues with the next group of newcomers.

Structures that preserve traditional leadership. Immigrant communities have their own organization of traditional leaders that play a critical role in advising, counseling, assisting, educating, and supporting the members. Examples of these leaders include elderly members, priests and pastors, individuals who used to be professors in their countries of origin, and women who were midwives or indigenous healthcare workers in their countries of origin.

While labor unions are not necessarily established to assist a particular group of immigrants, they become such forms of support by virtue of their memberships. In the District of Columbia, many members of the hotel and service industry tend to be Latino or African immigrants. In New York City, most of the cab drivers are immigrants from South Asia. After the September 11 event, the Cab Association collaborated with a local intermediary in the city to distribute information about places to obtain assistance.

4.2 Lessons Learned

The structures discussed in the preceding section exemplify different ways in which immigrants are organized. They can be viewed as civic structures through which immigrants contribute to American society by taking care of their own members or linking to mainstream American institutions. These structures also provide various means for identifying and engaging different levels of leadership--from grassroots to business to political leaders—in the immigrant community.

Traditional and adapted structures. The organization of immigrant communities tends to be based on structures in their countries of origin that are either sustained or adapted to the norms of American society. The extent to which the structures are adapted is based on the degree to which the immigrant group has integrated into American society.[7] It is important, therefore, for any civic participation effort to consider traditional and modified structures through which immigrant communities organize for self-help.

Functions of immigrant institutions vary according to cultural traditions and circumstances. An institution may assume different functions, depending on the immigrant community's traditions and circumstances. This institution also may not play the same role in the U.S. society or across immigrant communities. For example, the church has a more political role in the Latino community than in the Buddhist temple or the Korean church. The Chinese language school may be concerned about teaching Mandarin to Chinese children because parents fear that their American-born children will forget their culture. On the other hand, the language

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[7] Extensive research has been conducted on the relationship between assimilation of individuals and length of stay in the United States (c.f. Portes and Zhou, 1993; Rumbaut, 1997; Williams & Ortega, 1990); however, few studies link the social structure and organization of an immigrant community with other variables (e.g., size, distribution, average length of residence in the U.S.).

school for Latinos may focus on teaching English because parents fear that their children who migrated recently with them will not receive a good education if they do not speak English. Compatibility by function is more important than by the actual organizational structure.

5. LEARNING FROM OTHER CIVIC PARTICIPATION EFFORTS

A better understanding of the social organization or immigrant communities and the structures that support them provides insights into ways to mobilize immigrants to participate. As part of the learning circle process, ASDC gathered information about civic participation efforts across the nation that built on the organizational structures and civic traditions of immigrant communities. The implementers of these efforts were asked the following questions:

- What was the impetus for organizing?
- What issues did the effort address?
- What strategies were used, and what were the entry points for obtaining support?
- Did the effort try to organize more than one immigrant community? If so, which ones?
- What institutions and settings were involved in the process, and how did the efforts engage them?
- How did the strategies build on the cultural traditions and values of the immigrant community or communities?
- How did the effort make a difference and at what level?

The information was synthesized into vignettes. Participants in the learning circles were then asked to review the stories and discuss how the strategies could or could not be adapted to their communities. ASDC found many examples of civic participation efforts; those included in this section provided the most valuable insights.

5.1 Examples of Civic Participation Efforts

The Caribbean Immigrant Services. The impetus for organizing the Caribbean community, which included people from Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, and other English-speaking islands, came in the 1990s as an outgrowth of initiatives sponsored by the consulates of several Caribbean countries in New York, concern about the lack of political participation from the community despite its economic success, and increasing anti-immigrant sentiment. There is a strong tradition of political participation in the Caribbean countries; however, this tradition did not transfer to immigrant communities in New York or elsewhere in the United States. Thus, the organizing was dubbed by the Caribbean community as the "re-education" of its members.

The effort to re-educate Caribbeans built on two major organizational structures: religion and culture. Churches (e.g., Adventist, Methodist, Evangelical), cultural events (i.e., Labor Day Parade, Carnival, and music performances), and schools became the focal points for disseminating information about citizenship classes and voter registration. These messages emphasized to their Caribbean audiences that political participation in their homeland and in

New York City should no longer be perceived as discrete processes. With the feasibility of travel between the Caribbean and the United States and dual citizenship, political activism crosses national borders. This is an important point for attracting the attention of immigrants, because home country politics has always played a major role in the extent to which immigrants enter into American political institutions (Karpathakis, 1999). Political leaders in the Caribbean know that their constituency in New York City has voting power in the United States, which means that they can play a role in leveraging federal funds for foreign aid to their countries. As a result of the effort, Caribbean leaders were elected to the New York City Council, voter turnout increased, and more Caribbean immigrants applied for citizenship.

San Antonio Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition. Proposition 187 in California motivated the San Antonio Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition ("the Coalition") to organize more citizen initiatives and advocacy efforts in order to protect the rights of immigrants and refugees. Since San Antonio's immigrant community is comprised primarily of Mexicans, the Coalition went first to leaders of the group. The Mexican leadership in San Antonio is organized around nine associations. The Coalition met with the leaders of these organizations. Rather than simply seeking the leaders' advice, the Coalition invited them to join it and to help plan and direct its community initiatives.

The leader or *patrón* in the Mexican immigrant community in San Antonio is clearly represented by the leaders of the nine associations. Traditionally, in Mexico, *patrónes* constitute the leadership structure, and that structure is very hierarchical in nature. The Coalition used this system to obtain the commitment and support from the Mexican community and to gain access to the community networks supported by the associations. The Coalition's efforts led to a significant increase in the number of immigrants who attended citizenship classes and the number of naturalized citizens who registered to vote.

Eastern Philadelphia Organizing Project. In the last several years, the number of immigrants from the Dominican Republic was increasing in Philadelphia. The immigrant community, however, was not organized in a way that allowed it to access economic opportunities in mainstream society and to share power at the institutional level. The impetus for organizing came when members of the community needed jobs and it became essential to create a structure through which they could voice their economic needs and other challenges.

Because there were no formal structures on which the organizers could build, they looked for natural gathering points for Dominican immigrants. These turned out to be the grocery stores or *bodegas*. Since there was a cluster of grocery stores in a certain geographic location in the Dominican community and everyone in the community visited these stores at some point or another, the idea for a grocers' association developed. The association would resemble a cooperative in the Dominican Republic, modified slightly to assume a structure typical of associations in the United States. Modifications included elected officers and a formal leadership team.

In the Dominican Republic, the *bodega* had a more hierarchical structure that tended to have an administrative focus. The Eastern Philadelphia Organizing Project in Philadelphia

transformed the traditional *bodega* structure into an association that functions as a convenor and uniting force for the disparate groups of Dominicans throughout the city.

>   ***Mujeres Unidas y Activas (Active Women United)***. *Mujeres Unidas y Activas* began in 1990 as a result of a project that focused on Latina and Chinese women and their experiences as immigrants to the United States. Women from the Latino and Chinese communities were trained to conduct interviews with both groups. The interviews revealed that the two groups experienced similar difficulties, such as public health issues related to their housing conditions, domestic abuse, concern for their children's education, and poor counsel from immigration lawyers. After the research project was completed, the Latina women felt a responsibility to establish a support network to help them cope with their situations. Their Chinese counterparts did not have as much motivation nor time to develop a similar network.

>   Membership in the group grew to more than 300, primarily by word of mouth. Potential members must undergo a six-month "trial period" to demonstrate their commitment to the group. If they complete this period successfully, they can become members. The women advocate for the immigrant community and issues specific to women. In the public sphere, the group assumes both advocacy and education roles; in the private sphere, they work on issues related to self-esteem, parenting, and domestic abuse. *Mujeres Unidas y Activas* sponsored campaigns and presented their concerns to the City Council on issues related to bilingual education, translation services at health clinics, and immigrant rights.

>   The organization and its expansion built on gender traditions in the Latina culture by mobilizing the women around issues that are generally considered to be in the women's private sphere. Through educational workshops in self-esteem and empowerment, the women moved out of the private sphere into the public arena and began to take on broader challenges. The organization also tapped into the power of informal networks in Latino communities to spread information and recruit members. An evaluation of the organization showed that its major success has been its ability to merge and manage the different spheres and roles and to strengthen the women's understanding that all the processes are interdependent.

5.2 Lessons Learned

>   ***Mobilizing around homeland issues.*** Cross-border political participation would work best for immigrants who are permitted dual citizenship (e.g., El Salvador and Guatemala) and whose countries of origin are located close to the United States or have fairly good relations with the U.S. government. This strategy for motivating political participation in the United States was used in the 1970s by Greek immigrant leaders to lobby the U.S. Congress against approving more military aid to Turkey (Karpathakis, 1999). This strategy was also used to create a sense of cohesion among Salvadoran and Guatemalan immigrants who were still had strong ties with their families in those countries (Hamilton & Chinchilla, 2001). This strategy would not work well among immigrants who come from countries that receive less national attention or have less friendly relations with the United States. Likewise, it would be less effective among immigrants who have been in the United States for generations and who are more assimilated than are recent newcomers. The use of homeland issues for mobilizing participation also creates the risk of (1)

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focusing on the country of origin and not local issues in the United States, and (2) further dividing a group of immigrants into factions on the basis of their affiliations in their country of origin.

Building on the informal networks of women. This approach works well in immigrant communities where the women are more likely to have the opportunity (e.g., time) and ability (e.g., education, self-motivation) to step out of their traditional roles. For example, such an approach would not work as well in Laotian communities, where majority of the women are heads of households because their husbands were killed in the war. Activities such as those of *Mujeres Unidas y Activas* would only add to their responsibilities and might overburden them. On the other hand, Chinese women play a lead role in organizing and advocacy in the Washington metropolitan region. It is important for an organizing strategy to consider gender roles from an American cultural perspective as well as from the immigrant's cultural view and to examine the intersection of the two cultures.

Gaining entry and credibility through traditional leadership structures. The approach is applicable to any immigrant community that has a traditional leadership structure that serves as a gatekeeper to its members. For example, the Somali community has different tribes, each of which is typically led by elders. In order for any community initiative to succeed, the elders of all the tribes must be consulted and their consent obtained. Their approval will give the community initiative credibility. Comments from participants of the learning circle and other immigrants indicated that leadership in immigrant communities tends to be situational. Depending on the issue and situation, different leaders from within an immigrant community can be engaged as "messengers." At the same time, traditional leadership structures in some immigrant communities may only perpetuate class, gender, or other differences. It is essential that organizers be prepared for the extent to which they might encounter and be required to address traditions that reinforce inequities.

Identifying natural gathering points and traditions related to social gatherings. The experience of the Eastern Philadelphia Organizing Project provides an important lesson on how natural gathering points can be used to organize immigrant communities. In the Filipino community, for instance, tea time is a common social practice due to European influence. Therefore, "tea meetings" in restaurants are useful for attracting members of a community to discuss issues that concern them, listen to a speaker, or learn about how they can participate in civic affairs. Ethnic grocery stores play a major role in distributing information to large numbers of people. These stores frequently have bulletin boards where notices are posted in their native language. Performances by musicians and dancers and presentations by writers and political leaders from the immigrants' country of origin are often publicized by notices posted in local ethnic stores. These events draw large crowds and provide an effective avenue for outreach.

Developing and strengthening the "bridge generation." Young people are the ideal bridge generation for most immigrant groups, especially the 1.5 generation.[8] They tend to adopt a "hyphenated" identity (e.g., Korean-American, Afghan-American) and to be raised in traditional ways but schooled in the American way. The National Association of Latino Elected

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[8] 1.5 generation refers to "native-born children of immigrant parents and children born abroad who came at a very early age" (Portes, 1996:ix).

and Appointed Officials' Education Fund initiated a program in the southwest region that trained high school juniors and seniors to help immigrants complete citizenship applications. This enabled the youth to become politically involved and understand the relevance of citizenship, a status that they have taken for granted (Pachon, 1999).

6. BARRIERS AND POTENTIAL WAYS FOR OVERCOMING THEM

As mentioned before, immigrants may participate in their own communities but not necessarily in mainstream American institutions. An understanding of this distinction is essential in order to avoid any misinformed assumptions about the civic traditions of immigrants before and after their arrival to the United States. The barriers described in this section refer to the challenge of engaging immigrants in mainstream American institutions at the local and national levels.

6.1 Competing Structures and Goals

Urgent versus long-term needs. Recent newcomer and longer-established communities could have very different viewpoints and understanding about civic participation. Leaders of immigrant communities who have resided in the United States for a few generations understand the need for participation at local and national levels and the importance of voting power. Leaders of more recent immigrant groups are struggling to help their members learn about the school and economic systems so they develop the coping skills necessary for daily survival.

What can be done? There are advantages and disadvantages to mixing immigrant communities of different capacities and extent of establishment. Convening the different groups would allow the newer communities to learn from the more established ones and would promote coalition building. This approach would work if there were time, commitment, and resources for facilitating the exchange and relationship building. On the other hand, it is wise to convene only those groups with similar capacities if there is an urgent agenda that needs to be carried out and there is not adequate time or resources to support peer learning.

Range of civic organizations. Ethnic organizations are on the rise, according to Lien (1997), and their missions reflect a variety of origins that are based on homeland district, clan or family lineage, religion, occupation, political beliefs, and other factors. The varying origins and missions also give rise to internal conflicts or intragroup tensions within an immigrant community. Within one group, there could be many competing organizations with disparate missions, especially if they are attempting to influence the political landscape in their countries of origin (e.g., Pakistanis and Indian Muslims have opposing views about issues related to Kashmir, even though they may have joint cultural activities). One learning circle participant pointed out religion is separated from politics in the United States, but in Sudan and other African countries, the same degree of separation does not exist.

What can be done? Civic participation efforts must be approached and designed as coalition-building initiatives, implying that careful consideration must be given to an organization's stage of development and readiness to address civic issues that affect multiple immigrant communities. The capacity (resources, technical assistance, knowledge and skills) must exist to facilitate the process of building relationships and trust within and across immigrant groups. Using an issue to mobilize groups that are otherwise separate has proven to be one of the most effective strategies for identifying and building common ground.

6.2 Identity

The sense of being an "outsider." Immigrants tend to think of themselves as outsiders, and if they do not, they are reminded by Americans of their status. The Japanese-American experience during World War II (i.e., internment camps), the "Dotbusters" who killed and attempted to get rid of Indians in New Jersey in 1987, and the backlash against Arab-Americans after September 11, 2001, exemplify this tension, which is felt by immigrants and citizens alike. During interviews with immigrants from Afghanistan, Lee (2001) found that many of them did not think of themselves as Americans because their physical traits did not resemble those of people of European descent. Karpathakis (1999:71) found a similar attitude among Greek immigrants. He cited a 39-year-old woman who migrated to the United States when she was seven years old, who said, "immigrants, wherever they are, have no country. As long as you're an immigrant, you're stuck between countries. . . .We are foreigners and we are treated as such, not by those coming from elsewhere like us, but by the Americans."

What can be done? Immigrants and American citizens have to be informed about outsiders who have become "insiders" and successful immigrant organizations that have contributed to this nation in various ways. Such leaders and role models include Michael Dukakis, child of Greek immigrants, and Donna Shalala of Arab descent. Congressman Mike Honda of California, in collaboration with the National Football League, promoted respect for diversity by highlighting professional and amateur football players from various ethnic backgrounds during a television spot on ABC-TV's Monday Night Football (A Magazine, 2002).This message reached millions of people through a popular form of American entertainment (i.e., sports).

Binational identities. Most immigrants are caught in a web of competing national identities. This tension is felt particularly by individuals who migrated here as adults, hope to return to their country of birth, and are not permitted dual citizenship. Transnationalism and the convenience of air transportation, advances in communication (e.g., international broadcasting stations, the Internet), and economic interdependence reinforce the possibility of maintaining binational interest and commitments (Levitt, 1999; Rumbaut, 1997).

What can be done? Hyphenated identity is one consideration for recognizing biculturalism and, at the same time, reminding everyone of immigrants' responsibilities and rights as residents and citizens of the United States. Civic participation efforts could begin to use such definitions to describe all Americans including European- and African-Americans in order to "normalize" the concept. It should be recognized, however, that the racialization of America

into white, black, yellow, and brown groups is a countering force. Hyphenated identities can have a counteracting effect in that they may amplify everyone's differences and diminish the underlying purpose to motivate everyone toward one national identity.

6.3 Cultural, Language, and Other Barriers

Values based on cultural traditions and political circumstances. Some cultures promote values that are contradictory to democratic principles, for example, patriarchal structures that serve to obstruct the participation of women or promote the expectation that the leader will take care of everyone in the community. In other cultures in oppressed nations, members learned that participation in any action that questions their government would land them in trouble. An immigrant leader pointed out that it is even harder to convince a group of immigrants to get involved in an activity that they did not benefit from in their country of origin. For instance, the right to an education was not extended to lower-income citizens in Central America. Consequently, Central American parents are not likely to ask questions about their children's education when they migrate to the United States. East Asians are also not likely to approach school principals and teachers about their children's education because, according to their culture, teachers are figures of authority who should not be questioned.

What can be done? It is difficult to change or impose a set of values on anyone. A tremendous amount of education and experiential learning is required in order to help immigrants overcome this particular barrier. Civic participation efforts must help immigrants understand their rights and responsibilities as residents or naturalized citizens of the United States. This information has to reach immigrants in multiple and consistent ways, from the time they become legal residents to after they become citizens. Civic participation must be viewed as a process, not as an event. Too often, such education occurs only when the immigrant is applying for citizenship and has to attend English and civics classes.

7. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE IMMIGRANT EMPOWERMENT COUNCIL

The Civic Participation Initiative eventually led to the establishment of the Immigrant Empowerment Council, a body of 17 immigrant leaders who participated in the learning circle for more than one year. They represent immigrants with roots in 13 countries. Council members spent the first three months after the organization's establishment getting to know one another and developing a mutually acceptable governing structure. This was a challenging time for the Council because they had to balance the priorities of strengthening their relationships and trust with taking action. The Council was also not exempt from the insider/outsider tension felt by all immigrants. When it came time to name the group, a discussion about the appropriateness of the word "immigrant" ensued. Some members felt that the word should not be used if they plan to integrate themselves into the general American population through more participation. Other members felt that they would always be perceived as immigrants, regardless of their status or length of residence in the United States, and that the term was an essential part of their individual

and group identity. The Initiative had designed a learning circle process that allowed members to learn about each other's cultures and civic traditions but not about each other as individuals. The members requested and attended a half-day retreat that gave them time to learn about each other's communication and work styles and immigrant experiences.

The Council chose to work on parent engagement in schools as its first responsibility. This issue is common to every immigrant group in the Washington metropolitan area; resolving it requires collective attention. The Council also plans on reaching out to additional immigrant leaders, particularly those from communities that are fairly large in the local region and that are not currently represented in the Council (e.g., Kurds, Afghans, Indians, Salvadorans, Ethiopians, Mexicans, and Guatemalans).

Local funders and other mainstream American institutions expect the Council to become a major avenue for reaching immigrants in the Washington metropolitan area. Like any other immigrant group, the Council will be challenged by limited funds, staff support, competing demands on its individual members, and the tendency to overlook the link between culture and civic participation. Nevertheless, it is regarded a valuable resource for issues related to civic participation among immigrants.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCREASING AND SUPPORTING CIVIC PARTICIPATION AMONG IMMIGRANTS

Based on the information and analysis in previous sections, ASDC recommends the following considerations by any effort to increase and support civic participation among immigrants:

1. Civic participation has a wide range of meaning in different cultures and immigrant communities. Build on the cultural definition of the term to develop strategies that fit better with the values of the immigrant community.

2. Social organization of immigrant communities is not a name, a building, or a structure that can be easily identified. It is the way relationships are structured based on cultural traditions and values. Identify, understand, and acknowledge the wide range of structures that preserve the social organization of immigrant communities. They have specific political, social, economic, and cultural functions. Use these structures for reaching larger numbers of immigrants, especially those who tend not to use mainstream resources.

3. Different structures and organizations serve different functions in immigrant communities. Don't assume that a structure or an organization can be used for the same purpose across immigrant communities.

4. In every immigrant community, there will be tensions due to political, ethnic, socioeconomic, and generational differences. Have clear criteria and process for identifying and engaging the

appropriate leaders and structures for specific civic issues and don't be deviated by intragroup conflicts.

5. Leadership in immigrant communities is issue-based and situational. There are various levels and types of leadership. Each leader has a specific function in the social organization of his/her community. Recognize the diversity of leadership and be clear about which type of leadership is most appropriate to engage.

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