



## Blog: Community Psychology Principles for Asset-Based and Citizen-Driven Actions Can Help Immigrants Thrive

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Immigrants need our support to acculturate in their new homes and communities.

Helping immigrants integrate is beneficial for the immigrants as well as the host society<sup>1</sup>.

Community Psychologists support the development of citizen-driven programs to integrate immigrants by encouraging a host society's willingness to interact with them in meaningful ways.

See the companion video here:  
<https://youtu.be/pMifrRAx6tw>



Figure 1 Photograph by Frederik Trovatten:  
<https://www.pexels.com/photo/grayscale-photo-of-group-of-children-941125/>. Pexels CC).

“While communities may have stances on being inclusive, certain conversations can intersect host society member attitudes, bringing the needs of immigrant populations into the picture. Immigrant newcomers have different needs than other types of newcomers to a geographical area. This discussion aims to serve host society members who want to progressively include voices and needs of immigrant families into their geographic communities.”

### Highlights

**Acculturation includes attitudinal changes that take place after contact with culturally dissimilar people, groups, and social influences.**

**The process of acculturation invites host society members to adapt through contact with culturally dissimilar people.**

**Communities thrive when they actively welcome immigrants and proactively assist with their acculturation.**

In this video, I discuss action plans of acculturation using empowerment, the role of schools in shaping willingness to help immigrants integrate, communication strategies, and citizen-driven change in my hometown of Cincinnati, Ohio.

## Empowerment

- Host society and immigrants can take an active role in overcoming obstacles by building “tools” accessible to immigrants seeking to be self-sustained, self-reliant, and contributing members of society<sup>2</sup>.
- Access to language training is an essential form of empowerment for immigrants.

## Role of Schools to Support New Immigrants

- Schools are often an immigrant family’s first experience with an American institution and are often accessible regardless of documentation status.
- There is a need for intercultural sensitivity curricula to recognize one’s own culture among other complex and dynamic worldviews.
- Aspects of empathy development include educating American students about some challenges international students may face<sup>3</sup>. Service-learning is one way to advance intercultural sensitivity among host society youth.
- Educators play essential roles in shaping perceptions and attitudes of students. Shaping faculty attitudes and perceptions of immigrants and dispelling immigration myths can lead to an increase in advocacy for supporting undocumented students<sup>4</sup>.
- Schools can be a hub for developing resources for immigrant parents, especially parenting support programs. It is empowering to immigrant parents when schools take the extra time to ensure quality communication<sup>5</sup>.

## HOW DID A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE INFORM YOUR WORK?

Research-based communication strategies and behavior modifications by host society members can influence empowering acculturation styles, attitudes, and policies.

Community Psychologists are poised to work within neighborhoods, conducting research and action initiatives based on the assets. Community Psychologists can help bridge host society members’ attitudes and willingness to help immigrants with support and resources.

<sup>1</sup> Zimmermann, K. F. (2007). The economics of migrant ethnicity. *Journal of Population Economics*, 20(3), 487-494. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00148-007-0155-6>

<sup>2</sup> Burhan, O. K., & van Leeuwen, E. (2016). Altering perceived cultural and economic threats can increase immigrant helping. *Journal of Social Issues*, 72(3), 548-565. <https://spssi.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/josi.12181>

<sup>3</sup> King, C. S. T., & Bailey, K. S. (2021). Intercultural communication and US higher education: How US students and faculty can improve: International students’ classroom experiences. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 82, 278-287. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0147176721000596?via%3Dihub>

<sup>4</sup> Rodriguez, S., & Mccorkle, W. (2020). On the educational rights of undocumented students: A call to expand teachers’ awareness of policies impacting undocumented students and strategic empathy. *Teachers College Record* (1970), 122(12), 1-34. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/016146812012201203>

<sup>5</sup> Perriera, K. M., Chapman, M. V., & Stein, G. L. (2006). Becoming an american parent: Overcoming challenges and finding strength in a new immigrant latino community. *Journal of Family Issues*, 27(10), 1383-1414.

## Communication Strategies and Promoting Host Society Members to Help

- Language usage about immigrants can support a positive perception and willingness among others to help them. Communication strategies highlighting immigrants' high competence, lack of seeking competition of resources<sup>6</sup> and high effort to adapt to the cultural host society, such as learning English, can be effective in promoting willingness to help immigrants<sup>7</sup>.
- Promoting positive information about the benefits brought by immigrants is a strategy to improve host society attitudes toward immigration<sup>8</sup>. You can learn about recent research related to immigrant scientists and innovation on the NPR article titled "[New nation, new ideas: A study finds immigrants out-innovate native-born Americans.](#)"

## Citizen-Driven Actions

- Within geographical communities, supporting empowering acculturation practices is multidisciplinary.
- Identify community locations and situations where promotion of positive cross group contact can occur. Settings offering creative art expression, parenting support programs, and language-learning skills are examples of empowering ways to provide support and build cross-group friendships.
- Community centers, art centers, places of worship, libraries, and schools are locations to bridge communities and positively supporting mental health.

### What Does This Mean For?

**Research and Evaluation:** We need longitudinal research on host society members' attitudes and practices of immigrant acceptance impact on community outcomes. Continuing to look at aspects of neighborhood immigration initiatives could help shape immigration policies on state and national levels.

**Practice:** Embracing diversity and inclusion can begin with conversations surrounding one's family values of acceptance and hospitality toward others.

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<sup>6</sup> Liang, X., Liu, N., Zhu, X., & He, Y. (2021). Express acceptance or feel anxiety? The effects of trait-related information about foreign residents on endorsement of multiculturalism. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 82, 145-156. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0147176721000493?via%3Dihub>

<sup>7</sup> Burhan, O. K., & van Leeuwen, E. (2016). Altering perceived cultural and economic threats can increase immigrant helping. *Journal of Social Issues*, 72(3), 548-565. <https://spssi.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/josi.12181>

<sup>8</sup> Igarashi, A., & Ono, Y. (2022;2021;). The effects of negative and positive information on attitudes towards immigration. *International Migration*, 60(4), 137-149.