

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE

Executive Summary

NILC's decades-long mission has been to address the needs of low-income immigrants and their loved ones. We have undertaken litigation, policy advocacy, communications, and network-building efforts to help immigrants make healthy and secure lives for their families, build and exercise political power, and become integral participants in US democracy. NILC has evolved from an issue-expert resource for legal aid lawyers and immigrants' rights advocates to a movement-building leader that uses its unparalleled authority on laws and public policy to improve the lives and livelihoods of low-income immigrants nationally, and to support immigrant-led organizing.

Our Strategy: Promote Pro- Immigrant Policy, Consolidate Immigrant Power, Forge Consensus for Culture Change

Given today's political climate, NILC will pursue three core strategies over the next five years to achieve transformational change:

Build power to achieve progressive legal and policy reforms. NILC will combine advocacy, litigation, and communications strategies in our law and policy-reform efforts, focusing more on long- term movement building and power than short-term wins. We will not retreat from vigorous challenges to Administration policies that harm low-income and other vulnerable immigrants. But we will pivot to a more intensive people-centric focus on state and local policy objectives that improve immigrants' lives now, and that create openings for future policy and legal gains, shift hearts and minds, and amplify immigrant community voices. Our five-year goals for this strategy include:

- Expanding legal protections for immigrant families, and increasing their access to essential state and local-level services;
- Increasing humanitarian admissions to the United States, enhancing citizenship pathways, and developing more pro-immigrant champions within Congress and future administrations.
- Defeating or delaying policies that threaten immigrants' health, well-being, and economic security; and

- Broadening our partnerships with progressive movements, so that immigrants are centered within those broader agendas.

Strengthen and expand the movement for immigrant justice. NILC will assert an explicit movement leadership role through helping grassroots groups to boost their capacities and coordinating closely across the movement for immigrant justice to leverage power for transformational change. NILC will increase our bridge-building work among a broad range of progressive movement allies, and help forge a long-term movement vision grounded in racial, economic, and gender justice. Our five-year goals for this strategy include:

- Securing coordinated action among key movement partners based upon a powerful shared vision for the movement.
- Ensuring that our convenings and movement decision-making bodies are fully diverse, and that grassroots and community-based groups enjoy direct relationships with policymakers unmediated by larger organizations;
- Securing mutually beneficial and strategic alliances with progressive allies; and
- Stimulating transformational investment in multiple movement strategies by funders and donors.

Advance narrative and culture change. NILC will use all the tools at our disposal to supplant the harmful “us” vs. them” frames that dominate too many immigrant policy conversations. Through championing the constructive roles that all Americans play in forging the country’s future, NILC will undermine the “scarcity” myth that inclusion opponents have effectively deployed to prevent newcomers and receiving communities from uniting in common interest.

NILC will connect media and policymakers to people who can portray the human toll of regressive policies and can persuasively illustrate how restrictive immigration policies jeopardize the health and vitality of the country at large. Our communications strategies and goals will deeply inform our policy and litigation plans. Our five-year goals include:

- Assuming greater leadership in communications that articulate a pluralistic vision of America and promote long-term narrative and cultural change;
- Building common ground with vulnerable people who are separated from immigrant communities by cultural and political divides. We will pursue opportunities to forge mutual understanding of the true causes of the cultural anxiety and economic stress that they experience;
- Partnering meaningfully with directly affected communities across our narrative and communications work, including litigation, print publications, Congressional panels, and other events; and

- Securing agreement of candidates in key electoral races to center immigrants in their platforms and communications.

A Force for Progressive Change: How NILC Formulated this Shift in Strategy and Role

NILC successfully challenged anti-immigrant policies at the federal, state, and local levels long before the seismic political changes of 2016. We therefore were poised for leadership in stemming the new Administration’s devastating restrictionist agenda.

Several months into the new era, it became clear that our #Resistance role, while essential, was no longer sufficient. We set out on a disciplined, multi-step exploration of what the new reality required from us, and what we wished to demand of ourselves. NILC sought allies’ and supporters’ views about opportunities and challenges ahead. We concluded that NILC has the mission, tools, and expertise to advance pro-immigrant policies in states and localities that can improve people’s lives today, amplify those victories to build momentum toward progressive federal policy, and vigorously mobilize power to advance racial, immigrant, economic and environmental justice and equity.

The new era also demands that NILC expand our leadership in the immigrant justice movement. We sought feedback from over 40 sister organizations, policymakers, funders, and allies on the role we could play in making our collective work more robust and effective. Our colleagues affirmed that NILC’s decades-long focus on low-income immigrants and our unique breadth of legal, policy, and communications expertise make us an unparalleled resource for organizers, advocates, and the immigrant communities they serve. NILC’s bridge-building history and reputation for trustworthiness uniquely enable us to connect diverse sectors of the movement.

Allies support a deeper leadership role for NILC in strengthening alliances, articulating long-term movement vision, and explicitly adding power-building and narrative change to the toolbox that we effectively deploy.

Our Vision for the Future: Why this Strategy Is Right for NILC, the Movement, and the Country

For too many years, immigration policy has been trapped in the confines of Washington’s narrow political imagination. On one side is an ever-expanding set of walls –legal, political,

and physical – built by those who fear an inclusive future. On the other side is a broad set of federal immigration reforms that, while essential, seem infeasible in the current political climate.

Through our new strategic framework, NILC engages this struggle on a different plane. We know that the American dialogue must go far beyond “wall” vs. “status” to how immigrants live healthy and fulfilling lives today while confronting the scourges of race and class that have defiled our immigration debate for centuries. The best place to start this project is where Americans live and shop, worship and work. And the best people to lead this work are immigrant community members with lived experiences who have a seat at every decision-making table.

NILC’s work at the intersection of race, class, and immigrant justice have long made our advocacy partnerships in cities and towns successful and durable. Beyond the wins that our partners will achieve this year and next, our intersectional relationships will permit us to connect local efforts to hundreds of victories in towns across the country to signal immigrants’ growing clout.

As immigrant power and immigrants’ voices more deeply infuse the public square, allies and policymakers from across the progressive spectrum will recognize that immigrant justice is essential to making racial and economic justice a reality in the United States. And as we collectively change what Americans imagine an inclusive democracy to be, we will establish a firm foundation for humane national policies that benefit us all: a health care and safety net system that allows everyone to thrive; labor laws that protect all workers so they can fulfill their full potential; and federal policies that recognize migration as a natural global phenomenon that transforms societies for the better, and that forward-looking nations embrace.