

Research Strengthens Immigrant Justice Organizing and Advocacy



Background on Immigration Research Initiative

IRI began as a project of the Fiscal Policy Institute in 2006, and grew to the point that in 2021 we spun off and started Immigration Research Initiative as an expanded, free-standing project under the fiscal sponsorship of NEO Philanthropy.

From the start, our analysis dug into the different regions of New York State, recognizing different economic contexts, and different immigration contexts. And, we recognized that while immigration policy is a federal issue, a lot of the decisions about immigrant integration are decided at the state level, and that state policy changes require engagement from across these varying regions.

Our research has always been guided by work with our advocacy and organizing partners. We've worked with them to understand how research can help shape the overall political climate, responded to requests for economic and fiscal analysis around specific policy proposals, and played a convening role bringing together partners that don't always meet together to talk about expanding policy approaches.

Among the many groups in New York that we've worked with are the New York Immigration Coalition, Make the Road New York, African Communities Together, the Hispanic Federation, Asian American Federation, Asian Americans for Equality, SEIU 32BJ, RWDSU, Rural and Migrant Ministries, Worker Justice Center of Central New York, Justice for Migrant Families, Los Deliveristas Unidos, New York's refugee resettlement agencies, Centerstate CEO...and many more across the state and across different issue areas and constituencies.

IRI is a national organization, but we are particularly rooted in New York State. In other states, we work with our partners in the [State Immigration Project](#)—Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, National Immigration Law Center, and Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy at the national level. And, 43 state-based think tanks that work on budget and economic analysis in general, including 15 that are funded to specifically work with us on immigration. In New York, IRI is the group that has built relationships with the organizing and advocacy groups, local media, and local public officials; in other states we work with the State Immigration Project partners since they are the ones who have those trusted local relationships.

Our national orientation and partnerships allow us to carry a lot more weight than might be expected of an organization of our size. For economic and budget analysis, we often partner with the Economic Policy Institute, Urban Institute, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Migration Policy Institute, and others who allow us to bring world-class clout and capacity to our work. And, our engagement and partners in other states richly cross-fertilizes our work in New York.

Some past examples of our work in New York

1. NYS Dream Act

The Dream Act coalition first came to us and said the governor said he supported the proposal, but couldn't move forward without knowing the cost. Our Dream Act [cost/benefit analysis](#) and report on [community return on investment](#) triggered a [New York Times editorial](#), a [parallel cost/benefit analysis by the state comptroller](#), and was instrumental to breaking a log jam with the governor.

The campaign took on our framing of the cost issue: the annual cost to cost each taxpayer would be less than the price of a donut, an image that allowed for [clever campaign rallies](#) and gained and spurred added [news coverage](#).

A shift in the balance of power in Albany created the window of opportunity, and organizing and advocacy were what pushed to make it happen, but having the data lined up were an important piece of the puzzle.

NEWS > NEW YORK NEWS

Students rally with donut to show low cost of state Dream Act for tuition assistance



James Keivom/New York Daily News

2. Green Light Coalition

In 2019, The Green Light coalition won legislation that removed the restriction on driver's licenses for immigrants who are undocumented.

Our report on the [economic and fiscal implications of the driver's license bill](#), including a one-page analysis for [every region of the state](#), were cited in dozens of article about the bill. Working closely with the Green Light coalition, we were able to give key numbers about number of people affected, costs, and benefits. And we worked closely with the coalition to give a realistic idea about the positive

impact on insurance rates, saying it would be \$17/year, not a main reason to support the bill, but a nice side benefit and enough to buy a bouquet of flowers for mother's day.

- **New York auto insurance rates would go down by about \$17 per year** when more drivers are insured. That's not the reason to support this measure, but it's a nice side benefit to improving the lives of New York's immigrants: enough to buy a bouquet of flowers on Mother's Day!



3. 2020 Census

In the runup to the 2020 census, we joined New York Counts 2020 a broad based, state-wide coalition of advocates, organizers, service providers, and other researchers.

One of the key advocacy points was to highlight the importance of community-based organizations (CBOs) as trusted voices that could be effective in reaching out to individuals, families, and communities at risk of being missed in the 2020 census count.

The question was: how much is enough? How much money should the state, local governments, and foundations invest in making sure CBOs have the resources they need to do sufficient outreach?

The coalition was not sure what the answer should be, and they came to us to ask us to come up with a defensible cost estimate based on a quantitative analysis.

To answer this question we conducted a primary survey of community groups in all regions of New York State, the first of its kind, to understand their plans and needs in conducting census outreach. We used the results to develop a model for how much is needed for individual populations, and then used Census Bureau data about what it calls “hard to count” populations to show how much each of the 62 countis in New York State.

We published a report showing a need for [\\$40 million statewide, with a breakdown of what each county needed.](#)

We then worked with the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights to develop a model, based on our New York research, that could be used by other states and counties. This became a very popular tool around te country.

In the New York State budget for that year, \$30 million was set aside to support CBOs in all 62 counties. That’s less than the \$40 million we suggested was needed. But significant investments from the New York City government, some investments in individual counties, and a substantial effort from foundations eventually put the total very close to what we proposed.

And, it mattered. Although New York was projected to lose up to two seats in the House of Representatives, in the end, we lost just one, and came incredibly close to not losing a single seat. We were only 89 people short of retaining our 27th seat in the House.

4. Fund Excluded Workers Campaign

At the height of the pandemic, immigrant organizations were being pushed by their members to find a way to support people who were undocumented and being excluded from nearly every form of emergency assistance. Leaders of what became the Excluded Worker Fund reached out to us to help think about how to create a program parallel to the unemployment benefits everyone else was getting, and how much it would cost.

This was a truly state-wide coalition, and ultimately won a landmark [\\$2.1 billion in benefits](#) for immigrants who were undocumented parallel to what other workers were getting.

That victory led to a push for a broader and more permanent program, the Unemployment Bridge Program. IRI's analysis and policy engagement have been key components of the campaign: we lead the policy committee, brought in partnership from national experts, and provided the [analysis - with region-by-region impact around the state](#) - that has been a touchstone for the work.

Present and Future: IRI's work around Asylum Seekers and Newly Arriving Immigrants

Partnering with the Ellis Island Initiative

IRI has been partnering with the Ellis Island Initiative as they work in upstate New York to understand and help create solutions for resettling newly arriving immigrants. Cyierra Roldan presented at a meeting hosted by the Ellis Island Initiative in Albany, NY and David Kallick presented at another meeting hosted in Rochester, NY where they both discussed the economic projections of asylum seekers and new immigrants in New York. Cyierra was also part of the initiative's Albany convening. We are currently in discussions about additional analysis that will be relevant to local upstate areas in making the case that welcoming immigrants and helping them to thrive is good human rights policy and also good for the local economy; it's a great example of doing well by doing good.

Below are a number of areas where we have already been working that could expand in relation to upstate New York. In addition, two topics we are interested in pursuing that are particular to upstate are:

- The role of immigrants in population rebound for cities that have seen population decline. Dozens of cities across the country, including Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Albany, and Utica, saw population decline in the 1960s and 1970s. The only ones that saw a population rebound since then are cities that had a significant increase in immigrant populations. For economic development officials eager to see populations rebound, this might be a powerful case: if the plan is to grow without immigrants being a significant part of that growth, there are zero examples of that happening in the US over the past 50 years.
- The role of immigrants as the baby-boomer generation approaches retirement age. A key issue across upstate is a shrinking labor force, not only as people move out—in fact, not primarily for that reason—but rather because the population is getting older. We would be interested in spelling out how many people in each county will reach retirement age in the next 15 years, and how this compares with immigrant trends.

Convenings to Expand Policy Options

One of the limitations on how upstate localities are approaching the newly arriving immigrants is a lack of models and a narrow set of policy ideas. IRI can help expand this, and has been starting already.

Last year, IRI and partners at the Pratt Institute began co-convening a series of roundtable discussions that started with a discussion about better ways to spend the large amounts of money going to support shelter and housing. We have since formalized the group under the name Better Approaches to the Needs of New Immigrants and Longtime Residents, and have taken on questions related to receiving communities, and to work options (self-employment, cooperative businesses, training, industry labor standards).

The meetings have also taken on a formal structure of one meeting in-person in New York City with about 30 people gathering to discuss a topic, then a follow-up meeting online on the same topic, allowing us to dig deeper, and also making it for participation and perspectives from across the state and from around the country. Our most recent online meeting had over 70 participants. This work, together with our analysis, has given us a platform for participation in a number of local, state-wide, and national efforts and convening. We are expanding this work around the, and would be eager to do more to expand it in particular in New York State.



Shamier Settle leading the discussion on new immigrants, shelter, and housing.

Economic Projections Showing Future Benefits

IRI developed a model to show how new immigrants will get better jobs and improve their wages over time, with corresponding increases in taxes paid and role in the economy. [We ran this for all 50 states, and for the broad regions of NYS](#) (NYC, Long Island, Hudson Valley, and Upstate north/west of the Hudson Valley), and held a joint press conference about it in New York City with the NY Immigration Coalition.

The economic analysis has gotten extensive coverage around the country and in NY *when we did real follow-up with local partners*. We would be eager to drill down to look at each county in the upstate region, maybe pairing this with more detailed overall data about immigrants, and to release this together with a local partner in each locality.

Here are some examples of the coverage so far:

[NY1 Inside City Hall 7-minute TV in NYC](#)

[WROC TV Rochester](#)

[1010 WINS Radio](#)

[Syracuse Post-Standard Op-Ed](#) (together with Jessica Maxwell of the Worker Justice Center of Central NY)

[LoHud Op-Ed](#) (together with Carola Otero Bracco of Neighbors Link)

Economic Role of Immigrants on Long Island: A Model for Other Parts on NY State?

With a special grant from the Long Island Community Foundation (now New York Community Trust), IRI did a big report last year about immigrants on Long Island, with great input and review from the local organizing groups.

Below are links to some of what we did, and the coverage it got on Long Island.

Immigrants on Long Island

There are more than half a million immigrants living on Long Island, and they are a vital part of our communities and daily life

Fast Facts



1 in 5 Long Islanders are immigrants

El Salvador
India
Dominican Republic
China
Haiti

The 5 most common national origins for immigrants



31 percent of children have at least one immigrant parent



3 in 4 immigrants are homeowners

Immigrants are Fundamental to Long Island's Economy

We have been getting questions, especially from business and labor groups related to the Ellis Island Initiative, about whether we can do something similar for upstate regions, with local partners in the different regions. It would require foundation support, but we are eager to do this in as many locations as possible.

Some of the amazing coverage on Long Island

[News 12 TV Power and Politics interview](#)

[Newsday Article](#)

[Newsday Editorial](#)

[Long Island Business News front-page story](#)

[Press release](#) and [full report](#)

The Long Island [map, with data on individual counties, towns, and the East End](#).

Two infographics: [Immigrants on Long Island](#), and [Immigrants in Daily Life](#).

This doesn't cover everything IRI does. We didn't get into our work with street vendors, farm workers, deliveristas, domestic workers, or refugee resettlement agencies, for example. But it gives a sense of how we relate to organizing and advocacy groups, and how we work locally in different parts of the state and engage local groups in statewide advocacy.

And, it gives some sense of what more we could do to support local groups around the arrival of asylum seekers and new immigrants: helping shape policy options, tell a positive story in the media, and provide data and analysis to support advocacy efforts.



The full IRI staff: David Dyssegaard Kallick, Cyierra Roldan, Shamier Settle, and Anthony Capote.