

AN ASSET FUNDERS GUIDE TO

Supporting Immigrants and Refugees in an Era of Harm

A Collaborative Resource from the Asset Funders Network and
Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees



Grantmakers Advancing Economic Equity

Introduction

The Asset Funders Network (AFN), in collaboration with Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees (GCIR), developed this guide to help funders advancing economic mobility take action now to support immigrant communities. Written to be applicable across the country, we have focused on highlighting national resources and strategies with local application.



Grantmakers Advancing Economic Equity



Understand Immigration Is Within Your Funding Scope

Regardless of your funding issue area, priority population, or geographic scope, you have an opportunity to apply an intersectional lens inclusive of people who have migrated to the United States. Moving money to immigrant-led and immigrant-centered organizations can help foundations advance their strategic priorities, whether or not they explicitly relate to immigration.

Especially for funders focused on economic issues, it's critical to recognize that economic precarity creates the conditions for authoritarianism—a framing advanced by Darrick Hamilton and Manuel Pastor at AFN's November [2025 Economic and Immigrant Rights Summit](#). The failures of our economy—which does not meet the basic needs of people and generates extreme income and wealth inequality—are directly linked to the erosion of democracy and immigrant scapegoating we are experiencing.

AFN's work rests on the belief that an inclusive economy guarantees housing, healthcare, family care, debt-free college, dignified work, an income floor, an inheritance, and responsible financial services for everyone. Inclusive prosperity for all is an antidote to authoritarianism because when people have what they need to thrive, the appeal of scapegoating and division loses its power. Philanthropy is not powerless in this context: grantmakers across the spectrum have many viable solutions and funding strategies within their sphere of influence.

Engaging Corporate Funders or Conservative Stakeholders

Corporate funders and those working within conservative contexts or regions may find the [National Immigration Forum's](#) work particularly compelling. The Forum brings together moderate and conservative faith, law enforcement, and business leaders to advocate for practical immigration solutions. Its [Bibles, Badges, and Business](#) campaign and [Workforce Advance](#) program offer approaches to engaging audiences who may be skeptical of traditional immigrant rights framing.



Commit to Telling the Truth and Communicating Responsibly

In an era of brutal, authorized state violence against people based on who we are—the color of our skin, the language we speak, what work we do, where we live, and where we were born—our words matter. In real time, we are witnessing a regime invading localities governed by the opposing political party. Masked militia violate constitutional protections daily and are abducting our neighbors, kidnapping our children, and killing people in the streets and in camps—with impunity. How we understand and describe these events will shape our future.

The roots of this current crisis are part of our nation's long practice of othering. As John A. Powell, Director of the [Othering & Belonging Institute](#), teaches us: "Othering is not merely disagreement. It is the act of placing someone outside the circle of human concern—outside the boundaries of empathy, protection, and accountability." In the United States, othering has been used by dominating groups to justify harm and dehumanize groups, from the treatment of Indigenous peoples to the enslavement of Africans and African-Americans to the exclusion of newcomers, especially nonwhite immigrants. We explore this history more fully in the final section of this guide, which includes GCIR's timelines tracing citizenship, belonging, and migration patterns.

Given U.S. history, it is not surprising that we find ourselves here, witnessing the same dehumanizing logic deployed against those deemed to not belong today. But there is another way forward—one that recognizes immigrant people as belonging and whose flourishing is foundational to our collective prosperity. Let's commit to truth-telling and publicly communicating responsibly.

Move Resources Now

For philanthropic leaders advancing economic mobility, the cascading and destabilizing effects of this state-sponsored violence cannot be overlooked. Especially when a family's primary earner is detained, deported, or disappeared, the financial consequences are immediate and severe—threatening housing stability, interrupting educational progress, and eliminating pathways to long-term economic security.

Across the country, community organizations are stepping up to meet this urgent need. Here is a partial list needing your support and participation. Join them.

1. Help Immigrant Families Protect Their Finances and Assets

Fund local organizations to support the implementation of the [Appleseed Network's Deportation Planning Manual](#), which details how individuals can prepare for potential deportation—addressing bank accounts, credit cards, bills, loans, leases, insurance, real estate, and other financial matters. The [Immigrant Legal Resource Center's Step-by-Step Family Preparedness Plan](#) is another toolkit more focused on legal matters.

2. Fund Economic Stability Assistance

By providing unrestricted cash assistance and other forms of mutual aid, financial stability funds offer immediate cash security to families placed in crisis. The [Mission Asset Fund's ALMA Grant Program](#) is designed for scalability. The Mission Asset Fund's ALMA Grant Program has turnkey infrastructure ready for national deployment—it simply requires funders to capitalize the program in their region.

The [Fund for Housing and Opportunity's Meet the Moment Rapid Response Fund](#) deploys pooled philanthropic dollars swiftly to communities facing drastic HUD funding cuts and draconian immigration enforcement. The fund supports tenant organizing to prevent displacement and prepare communities for ICE enforcement, as well as emergency legal defense for tenants facing eviction—ensuring frontline organizations have the flexible resources needed to respond when federal policy puts housing stability at risk.

3. Fund Rapid Response

The [Four Freedoms Fund's Immigration Frontlines Fund](#) is a national rapid response fund aimed at defending and protecting immigrant communities while building toward a more welcoming, inclusive future for all. The fund provides a vehicle for funders to support immigrant rights organizations in 38 states in moments of opportunity and crisis.

[Human Rights First](#) and the [National Immigration Legal Response Alliance](#) have launched the [ReadyNow! App](#), a secure mobile tool that empowers immigrants to create personalized emergency plans and notify trusted contacts, arrange childcare, and to connect quickly with pro bono legal support with one click during ICE encounters.

For funders interested in investing in technology-based solutions, [Justicia Lab](#) develops tools for immigrants and their advocates to navigate our immigration system, find workplace justice, and more.

How We Fund Matters

Sometimes it's better to be transactional. Organizations in the immigration space and their leaders are in crisis and have been for at least a decade. They don't have the capacity to develop relationships over multiple meetings. Consider compensating them for anything that requires their resources, including taking meetings, completing letters of inquiry, and submitting grant applications.

4. Fund Legal Support

Legal representation can mean the difference between life and death, between family separation and reunification. Immigrants with legal counsel are significantly more likely to avoid deportation, be released from detention, secure necessary medical care, protect their legal status, and preserve pathways to remain in the United States.

The [Defending Our Neighbors Fund](#), created by [United We Dream](#) and the [ACLU](#) and hosted at [Abundant Futures Fund](#), deploys grants to organizations providing legal representation and bond assistance, prioritizing those rooted in immigrant communities, operating near detention centers or within legal deserts, and serving children and people at risk of deportation without due process.

The [Immigration Advocates Network's National Immigration Legal Services Directory](#) lists nonprofit organizations that provide free or low-cost immigration legal services.

Additional expert national organizations offering legal resources or services include:

- [Catholic Legal Immigration Network](#)
- [Detention Watch Network](#)
- [Immigrant Defense Project](#)
- [Immigrant Legal Resource Center](#)
- [Kids In Need of Defense](#)
- [National Korean American Service and Education Consortium](#)
- [National Immigrant Justice Center](#)
- [National Immigration Law Center](#)
- [National Immigration Project](#)

Supporting Impact Litigation

Beyond funding direct legal representation, philanthropic partners can support impact litigation – cases that challenge unlawful or unconstitutional policies and practices at a systemic level. The [Impact Fund](#) provides litigation cost grants to small law firms, solo practitioners, and nonprofit organizations pursuing immigration-related impact litigation, including challenges to ICE/DHS misconduct, detention center conditions, and federal and state immigration policies and agency actions.

5. Fund Efforts to Document the Economic Violence and Harm

We must not overlook the economic dimension of this state violence. Income and wealth are being stripped from communities, homes threatened, businesses shuttered, property damaged, and local economies destabilized. Support efforts to document this economic harm—evidence that will be critical for future litigation, policy change, and reparations. AFN's February 2026 webinar, [Funding the Evidence: Building the Economic Record as Strategy toward Economic Justice](#), spotlighted this work. Watch the recording and view the slides.

Support the Community Protection Fund

AFN member, the Latino Community Foundation, has launched the [Community Protection Fund](#) to hold ICE accountable and protect the families they target.

The Fund will support efforts to hold government actors accountable for unlawful actions, violence, and trauma inflicted on American communities, prioritizing:

- **Real-time monitoring and legal observation**, including training community observers, recording ICE actions, filming confrontations, and sharing footage publicly
- **Rapid response networks** that organize direct action, including Know Your Rights education, accompaniment, and hotline coordination
- **Legal advocacy and litigation** challenging unlawful enforcement practices, detention conditions, and government or private contractor misconduct

- **Policy, legislative, and oversight work** that increases transparency and limits harmful enforcement, such as advocacy for local legislation to prosecute DHS agents for unlawful actions
- **Research, data, and investigative journalism** documenting enforcement patterns, detention conditions, and community impact

The Fund will also support families and individuals in crisis by resourcing local, grassroots Latino-serving nonprofits working to:

- **Coordinate direct assistance and essential services** for impacted individuals and families, such as neighborhood volunteer deliveries of groceries and infant care needs
- **Provide immediate economic support**, including cash assistance, rental assistance, and food assistance
- **Offer mental health and trauma support**, including short-term crisis counseling, support for children and caregivers, psychological first aid trainings, and healing practices for organizers and volunteers

6. Fund Economic Mobility and Employee Ownership

Invest in organizations that address structural barriers to good jobs and opportunities underpinning economic mobility. Organizations like [Immigrants Rising](#), [Upwardly Global](#), and the [International Rescue Committee](#) provide career support for workers and entrepreneurs by bridging and reimagining traditional systems.

Fund the growing movement of employee ownership and immigrant-led worker cooperatives — one of the most underinvested economic mobility strategies available. Worker-owned cooperatives can offer a legal pathway for undocumented entrepreneurs to participate as business owners. The [Democracy at Work Institute](#) and the [Sustainable Economies Law Center \(SELC\)](#) are the leading national organizations supporting this work. SELC's [Co-opLaw.org](#) offers free, plain-language legal resources for cooperative entrepreneurs and the organizations that support them, with several resources available in Spanish.

7. Fund Long-Term Power Building

The [Abundant Futures Fund](#) is a national funder collaborative supporting the immigrant justice movement—protecting families, strengthening organizations, and building lasting power for systemic change.

Fund organizations building durable power in immigrant communities. [The National Day Laborer Organizing Network's The Immigrant Defense Fund](#) supports legal defense, community organizing, and public advocacy for families under attack. [Freedom for Immigrants](#) works to end immigration incarceration through organizing, strategic communications, and other forms of advocacy. Additionally, [GCIR's California Immigrant Justice Infrastructure Fund](#) invests in and strengthens a thriving power-building ecosystem that addresses the immediate and long-term needs of immigrant and refugee communities across the state.

8. Fund Strategic Communications and Narrative Change

[Tides Foundation's Immigrants Belong \(I-Belong\) Fund](#) promotes a pro-immigrant future by investing in the storytelling power of immigrant communities and proximate leaders at the forefront of community change.

[Justice Action Center](#) uses litigation and storytelling strategies to realize a future where the freedom to move is respected, immigrant narratives are rooted in dignity and belonging, and people seeking safety can access protection through systems that value humanity over exclusion.

[Brave of US](#) is a national coalition of advocates rejecting this authoritarian regime's efforts to spread fear and instead affirming that immigrants are integral to our communities, our culture, and our country.

[Define American](#), founded by journalist Jose Antonio Vargas, empowers nuanced storytelling about immigrant experiences to help audiences see immigrants in their full humanity.

Have a Lasting Effect: Use GCIR Messaging Toolkit

When making the case for supporting immigrants in your grantmaking strategies, [GCIR's messaging toolkit](#) is an essential resource. GCIR developed this toolkit to help funders engage their institutional leaders about the urgency of the moment and supporting immigrant communities in our grantmaking. This toolkit provides compelling talking points linked to universal values and shared priorities, addresses common concerns foundation leaders may raise, and offers concrete guidance on how to bring these messages into everyday philanthropic practice.

Immigrants' Economic Impact: What Funders Need to Know

The economic contributions of immigrants are well-documented across multiple research organizations and policy institutes. However, asset-building funders must approach economic arguments with care, recognizing both the reality of immigrants' contributions and the exploitation they face within our current economic system.

- Immigrants “may have already prevented a fiscal crisis,” according to the [Cato Institute's 2026 analysis](#). From 1994 to 2023, immigrants generated a fiscal surplus of \$14.5 trillion, paying more in taxes than they received in benefits every single year. Without these economic contributions, U.S. public debt would exceed 200 percent of GDP—nearly twice its 2023 level.
- In 2023, immigrants contributed \$2.1 trillion in economic output to the U.S. economy, paid approximately \$652 billion in federal, state, and local taxes, wielded \$1.7 trillion in spending power, and accounted for 19 percent of the U.S. civilian workforce. ([American Immigration Council](#), [Council on Foreign Relations](#), and the [Economic Policy Institute](#)).
- Between 2000 and 2022, immigrants accounted for nearly three-quarters of all growth in the civilian, prime-age labor force, according to the [Migration Policy Institute](#). As the U.S. population ages and enters retirement, immigrant workers and immigration will become increasingly important for driving labor force growth.
- Immigrants demonstrate high rates of entrepreneurship and innovation. Forty-six percent of 2024 Fortune 500 companies were founded by immigrants or their children, according to the [American Immigration Council](#). Between 2000 and 2018, immigrants authored 30 percent of patents in industries critical to economic and national security, where they also comprise one-fifth of the workforce and 36 percent of graduate-degree holders ([Economic Innovation Group](#)).

Undocumented Immigrants' Economic Contributions

The U.S. workforce includes 8.5 million undocumented workers who are overwhelmingly in their prime working years, with 79 percent aged 25-54, according to the [Center for Migration Studies](#). Over half (52 percent) have been in the country for at least 10 years, with over one-quarter residing in the country for more than 20 years (28 percent).

The [Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy](#) found that undocumented immigrants paid \$96.7 billion in federal, state, and local taxes in 2022. Most of that amount, \$59.4 billion, was paid to the federal government, while the remaining \$37.3 billion was paid to state and local governments. More than a third of the tax dollars paid by undocumented immigrants go toward payroll taxes dedicated to funding programs that these workers are barred from accessing. Undocumented immigrants paid \$25.7 billion in Social Security taxes, \$6.4 billion in Medicare taxes, and \$1.8 billion in unemployment insurance taxes in 2022.

In a large majority of states (40), undocumented immigrants pay higher state and local tax rates than the top 1 percent of households living within their borders. Six states raised more than \$1 billion each in tax revenue from undocumented immigrants living within their borders: California (\$8.5 billion), Texas (\$4.9 billion), New York (\$3.1 billion), Florida (\$1.8 billion), Illinois (\$1.5 billion), and New Jersey (\$1.3 billion).

Why Immigrants Contribute More Than They Receive

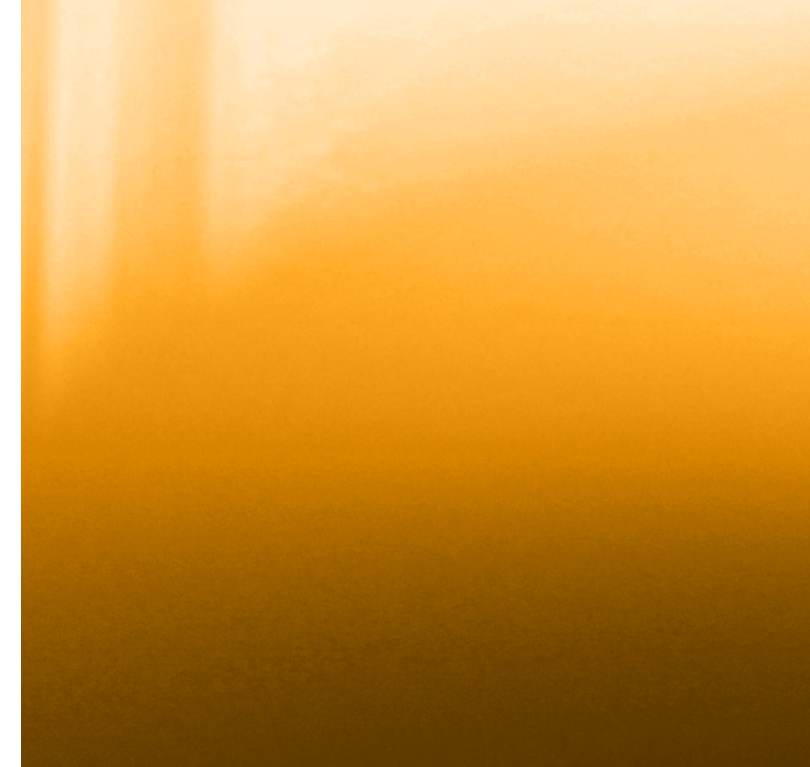
The [Migration Policy Institute](#), [Economic Policy Institute](#), and [National Immigration Law Center](#), among others, have shown that immigrants are systematically excluded from public benefits despite paying taxes that fund them. With very limited exceptions, undocumented immigrants are barred from all federally funded public benefits. They are ineligible for SSI, SNAP, TANF, non-emergency Medicaid, CHIP, and cannot receive subsidized health coverage through the Affordable Care Act. Even most legal permanent residents face a five-year waiting period before qualifying for federal benefits. Immigrants are barred from Social Security and Medicare if they lack the necessary work history—Medicare requires about 10 years of qualified work.

Additionally, undocumented immigrants are often barred from tax credits and frequently don't claim refunds owed to them due to a lack of awareness, immigration status concerns, or insufficient access to tax preparation assistance.

The Economic Impact of Policy Choices

The [American Immigration Council](#), [Brookings Institution](#), and [Economic Policy Institute](#), among others, have extensively researched the national impact of mass deportation campaigns. Mass deportation would devastate the U.S. economy, depressing national wage and salary income by \$317 billion and costing at least \$315 billion to implement. For every one million unauthorized immigrants deported, 88,000 U.S.-born workers lose their jobs due to reduced business investment and consumer demand. When immigration enforcement reduced childcare worker supply, college-educated mothers were forced out of the workforce because they lost access to affordable care—illustrating how deportations create cascading harm throughout our economy.

In contrast, providing work authorization to undocumented immigrants would increase their tax contributions by \$40.2 billion per year to \$136.9 billion through higher wages and improved tax compliance, according to the [Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy](#).



The Caution on Economic Arguments

Asset-building funders must be particularly attentive to the risks of using economic arguments in defense of immigrants and immigration. As noted in GCIR's messaging toolkit, making the case for supporting immigrants by reminding audiences of their economic contributions is effective, but it comes with significant risks. Such arguments can contribute to harmful “deservingness” narratives, implying that immigrants who don't work—such as children, older adults, or those with certain disabilities—have less inherent worth. When using the economic argument, always combine it with statements that affirm the rights and dignity of all, including immigrants.

When we do make the case that immigrants are essential to our economy, we must also tell the truth about exploitation. Immigrant workers face systematic wage theft, dangerous working conditions, employer intimidation, and harassment—often with no recourse because employers weaponize immigration status to keep workers silent. Economic arguments in support of immigration must name this reality—and must also point toward something better: an economy that sees immigrant people not as laborers and consumers, but as rights-holders whose human flourishing and economic well-being are necessary for our shared prosperity.

To Continue Your Learning Journey

Data and Demographics

Access comprehensive demographic and economic data to understand migration patterns and immigrant communities:

- The [Center for Migration Studies](#) provides research and data on immigration trends, undocumented populations, and the economic contributions of immigrants.
- The [Migration Policy Institute's Migration Data Hub](#) provides the most current demographic, social, and economic data about immigrants at national and state levels.
- [USC's Equity Research Institute \(ERI\) California Immigrant Data Portal](#) offers state-specific data disaggregated by immigration status, race, and ancestry to support those serving California's immigrant communities.

Peer Learning

Join [GCIR's Advancing Economic Justice Community of Practice](#), a confidential, peer-driven space where funders can explore strategies to support immigrant and refugee workers, build power in historically exploited sectors, and shift economic systems toward equity and dignity.

AFN Resources

Explore these AFN resources:

- [Inclusive Economic and Immigrant Rights Summit](#) (2025)
- [Supporting the Economic Security of Undocumented Californians](#) (2022)
- [Immigrant Lives, American Futures: Linking Asset Building and Immigrant Integration Brief](#) (2018)

Historical Context: The Roots of Othering

Understanding today's crisis requires understanding its origins. Settler-colonizers established a creation myth that nonwhite people are less human than white people to justify the theft of land and genocide of Indigenous peoples, the original stewards of this land. The othering justified military massacres, legalized enslavement, and government bounties on Indigenous lives – and persists through land dispossession for development, environmental racism, and other systemic processes.

The U.S. economy was then built on chattel slavery, a system upheld by the othering of Black people and a fabricated racial hierarchy. Bryan Stevenson, Founder of the [Equal Justice Initiative](#), has shown that this legacy runs directly to present-day militarized policing—central to today's crisis: "This belief in racial hierarchy survived slavery's abolition, fueled racial terror lynchings, demanded legally codified segregation, and spawned our mass incarceration crisis."

We have long scapegoated immigrant people and treated them as disposable—less than human inputs and outputs to be exploited, extracted, excluded, and expelled—rather than as human beings with inherent rights.

GCIR's Historical Timelines

GCIR has developed rich timelines detailing who gets to be an American, how citizenship has evolved, and how the United States has determined who belongs and who does not.

- [Citizenship in the United States, 1781 – Present](#) explores how fights for citizenship rights have evolved for various groups over time.
- [U.S. Intervention and Modern Migration in the Americas](#) offers nuanced analysis of the migration flows and patterns we see today.
- [Destination Detroit](#) features the history of Black, African, Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian (BAMEMSA) communities in Detroit, Michigan, and across the United States.



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