

Tennessee Immigrant & Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC)

Fiscal Year 2020 Direct Appropriations Request

Contact Information for this Request:

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On behalf of the Tennessee Immigrant & Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC), we request \$100,000 through Direct Appropriations in order to fund three programs that promote the civic participation and engagement of the immigrant community with the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County. There are 86,400 foreign-born residents in Davidson County, 12.5% of the total population, and tens of thousands of U.S. born Nashvillians whose parents, spouses, or other close relatives are foreign-born. The city and county thrive when all residents and families in a community thrive and participate fully. Greater immigrant participation will benefit the City of Nashville through lower service costs, increased revenues, and stronger relationships between residents and Metro Government. In Fiscal Year 2020, we request funding to enhance our current partnerships with local government agencies to ensure that immigrant communities in Nashville naturalize and participate in the census, and that they have increased access to resources, including legal representation in immigration proceedings.

Naturalization

More than 23,000 Davidson County residents are currently eligible to apply for naturalization. TIRRC requests \$35,000 to fund outreach efforts to at least 3,500 of these residents to provide the resources and information they need to become citizens. This funding will support an ongoing partnership between TIRRC and the Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County's Office of New Americans, which is a part of Cities for Citizenship's national program, *America is Home*.

Becoming a United States citizen opens a world of opportunities; namely, the ability to fully participate in the civic life of one's community by voting. On average, new U.S. citizens will increase their income by 8 to 11 percent and are less likely to be unemployed, which decreases the likelihood they will rely on public services. In fact, new citizens actually increase local and federal tax revenues through homeownership and enhanced spending power. Through naturalization, new Americans can access many options not previously available to them, such as public-sector jobs, a U.S. passport, the ability to visit their home countries, and freedom from the ever-present fear of deportation.

We will reach 3,500 people face-to-face and provide them with the information and tools they need to apply for naturalization independently, and for at least 130 low-income individuals without complex cases, we will host application assistance workshops where pro-bono attorneys and community volunteers assist in applying for citizenship and completing a fee waiver application to waive the prohibitively high costs of citizenship. TIRRC has been at the forefront of naturalization efforts in Tennessee since our program launched in 2007, assisting more than 550 people to naturalize since inception. Nashville has long been a leader in leveraging the resources of local government to promote naturalization, including the Pathways for New Americans program, which promotes citizenship and English language learning at libraries and community center. Currently Metro Parks community centers and the Nashville Public Library partner with TIRRC to provide space for our application workshops and English classes, as well as citizenship classes. In 2018 for National Citizenship Week, Mayor Briley helped a family complete its naturalization application at a group workshop, and addressed the crowd and media in attendance to encourage naturalization.

TIRRC's multi-year partnership with the Mayor's Office as part of the new *America is Home* initiative offers the opportunity to strengthen and expand these efforts and to include citizenship promotion in Metro Schools. Nashville was one of only 16 cities selected for this prestigious program through which TIRRC received a \$40,000 national grant, with the goal of securing additional matching funding from local businesses and government agencies. We have secured two new funding partners, and are requesting additional funding for

the program through Direct Appropriations. We also will leverage volunteer time and in-kind donations to support the program; we anticipate at least \$35,000 in volunteer time and another \$2,500 in discounted advertising spots in local media outlets.

Census

Ensuring Nashville's immigrant and refugee residents are accurately counted in the 2020 Census is essential - undercounts skew data used for government funding, political redistricting, and identifying high-need areas. TIRRC requests \$35,000 to support efforts to ensure that hard-to-count communities, especially immigrant and refugee communities, are not undercounted in the 2020 Census. We will participate in all of Metro Government's efforts to convene Census outreach leaders, and we will work with the Mayor's Office of New Americans, the New Americans Advisory Council, and all of our area partners to ensure that a cohesive, effective plan is implemented to reach all target audiences.

Without TIRRC's engagement, we fear that the immigrant community will not be accurately counted in the 2020 Census. Research shows that immigrant communities and low-income communities are historically underrepresented in Census counts. Overall, Census response rates are dropping sharply every 10 years. As of 2017, an estimated 84,700 immigrants lived in Davidson County, including 56,000 non-citizens who will require targeted and strategic outreach to more fully participate in the Census. Two-thirds did not speak English at least "very well," meaning they likely will need assistance or more encouragement to participate in the Census. Now, in an era of shifting immigration policy and with the potential inclusion of the citizenship question, we believe immigrants are even less likely than before to participate in the Census.

Our goal is to reverse the pattern of Census underreporting in immigrant communities through outreach, education, and assistance. TIRRC, with our trusted name and proven track record of mobilization, is uniquely positioned to boost participation among immigrants and refugees while being able to leverage resources and infrastructure to support the efforts of Metro Nashville government and community-based organizations working to increase participation of other hard-to-count communities.

We already have been invited to apply for \$200,000 from the Census Equity Fund to facilitate the census participation of the immigrant community in Tennessee, including in Metro Nashville. We need to raise another \$75,000 to run the program at full capacity. In addition to \$35,000 in Direct Appropriation support, we can secure the remaining \$40,000 from national and local foundation partners. We will also leverage \$5,000 in in-kind support for interpretation and discounted advertising.

Access to Justice and Resources in the Immigrant Community

Nashville's immigrant population has grown dramatically over the past decade, outpacing the capacity of many public and private agencies. This is especially true in the realm of immigration legal services. While the private bar and the non-profit sector have expanded to provide legal aid to immigrant families, the need continues to strain existing infrastructure, leaving many Nashvillians without access to representation. Over the past several years, TIRRC has played a critical role in bridging this gap through mass community education that connects communities to existing resources and developing innovative models of providing immigration legal services at scale.

We request \$30,000 to strengthen and expand our infrastructure to ensure that immigrant families in Nashville have more equitable access to services, opportunities, and justice. Specifically, we seek funding to support our resource referral system, community education, and legal services to help immigrants navigate the criminal and civil immigration systems.

Resource Referral System: Annually TIRRC receives 5,000 requests for assistance or referrals to government and nonprofit agencies and legal services. Since the program launched three years ago, our request volume has doubled each year. Our referral system is the only one in Davidson County tailored to the unique needs of the immigrant community. We offer support in five languages routinely, and others as needed. Support is provided via phone, text message, and social media direct messages. Our primary objective is to help people

access the services, programs, or legal representation for which they are eligible, and our referral database includes over 200 partners. We make many referrals to Metro agencies including Metro Social Services or the Domestic Violence Division of the Metro Nashville Police Department on a regular basis.

Community Education: Through our referral system we identified gaps in resources to help immigrants navigate immigration legal matters, resulting in family separations, prolonged detention, and communities being taken advantage of by unscrupulous businesses. We developed a system of mass community education and training programs to ensure immigrants have access to good information, are prepared for encounters with immigration agencies, and are connected to high quality legal services. Similar to the “navigator” model of the Affordable Care Act implementation, we will train 25 leaders each year to make sure members of their congregations, neighborhoods, and workplaces know how to access resources. We also conduct over 200 presentations each year, reaching 8,952 individuals, where we provide *Know Your Rights* information, toolkits and referral lists.

Legal Services: Through our mass education and resource referral lines, we also connect with individuals who are in need of low-cost or free legal services to low-income immigrants in Nashville. Where most legal services models depend on individual clients coming to receive one-on-one services, our program takes legal expertise and resources into the field and use workshop models of legal service delivery to increase access to services. We host *Family Defense Workshops* where immigrants can complete powers of attorney to ensure that their children are provided for in the event of an arrest, detention, or deportation. We also provide legal screenings to help individuals identify whether they are eligible for certain forms of immigration relief. Through our hotline and these workshops, we then refer individuals to our network of partners for more complete legal representation, including Justice for Our Neighbors, the private bar, or our in-house attorney, depending on the case.

We already have already raised \$50,000 for this program, and have requests out for another \$100,000 in funding. We are in need of another \$30,000 to fund the program for Fiscal Year 2020, and we are hopeful that once the program is fully operational we will be able to cover costs with earned revenue from nominal fees charged by our attorney, as well as membership dues from TIRRC members. This program also receives quite a bit of volunteer support, with an anticipated 100 volunteers who participate in presentations, the referral system, and workshops.