

Rutgers plans to launch N.J. 'immigration infrastructure map' online

By Jeff Diamant/The Star-Ledger

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From Ukraine, Mexico, Korea, Liberia — indeed, from virtually every nation on the map — the nearly 2 million immigrants living in New Jersey have made their presence known from the state's urban north to its rural south.

Where they have settled and, more importantly, how they have been helped in acclimating to their new surroundings are the focus of an unusual effort at the Eagleton Institute of Politics in New Brunswick.

The Rutgers Immigration Infrastructure Map, a work in progress since last June, will identify and describe each of the 650-plus social-service agencies in New Jersey that support immigrants, and will map them on a website.

By publicizing the agencies' work, project organizers hope to help immigrants adapt to their new life, and to determine where more services are needed. The map is expected to be made public in June or July.

"We want people to be able to find advocacy organizations and to hook up with people doing community organizing or day care," said Anastasia Mann, program manager with the Program on Immigration and Democracy at Eagleton, adding that the "purpose of this endeavor is to look at the immigrant infrastructure in the state to see where it needs shoring up, and to see where it's strongest."

The idea came from a panel convened by former Gov. Jon Corzine to explore how immigrants could be better integrated into the social and civic fabrics of New Jersey. Corzine's successor, Chris Christie, and other political conservatives oppose several of the recommendations made by the panel in its 2009 report, but the idea for the map won \$110,000 in grants from Rutgers and the Carnegie Corp. last spring.

Cultural organizations representing every ethnicity in the United States have been helping newcomers from the motherland for more than a century. But finding these organizations is not always easy, said Janice Fine, who devised the project idea while on Corzine's panel.

"We need to map the infrastructure," said Fine, a professor of labor studies and employment relations at Rutgers who teaches courses on immigration. "It's not like there's a single organization in a community that has a shingle outside that says, 'We are the place to go!' My sense is, there are all these interested organizations playing a role — a mix of organizations doing it informally and organizations doing it formally."

Amy Gottlieb is program director of one of the organizations on the map, the American Friends Service Committee's Immigrant Rights Program in Newark. She said the project is especially important at a time when government budget cuts are hurting social-service agencies.

"It's really important that people know where they can go for help," she said. "To have a resource that pulls it together and delineates what's being done where, by who, for whom, and how people can plug into that, is very important."

About 20 percent of New Jersey residents were born outside the United States. Hudson County has the highest percentage of immigrants of any New Jersey county — approximately 40 percent, with the Dominican Republic, Cuba and Ecuador among the most common nations of origin. About 30 percent of Union County's population is foreign-born, as are 28 percent of the populations of Bergen and Middlesex counties, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey.



David Gard/New Jersey
Local News Service

Anastasia Mann is the program manager for an Eagleton Institute of Politics project to design an "immigrant map" of New Jersey. The map will try to identify every single community-based organization in New Jersey that caters to immigrants.

The Department of Homeland Security estimates there are 1.75 million immigrants in the state, 360,000 of them illegally.

In an office at the Eagleton Institute, on Rutgers' New Brunswick campus, Mann is directing a team of three graduate students compiling the information. They have sent out questionnaires to every organization they can find in New Jersey that helps immigrants: cultural organizations, advocacy groups, charities, even libraries. They ask about the organization's size, the home countries of people it helps, languages spoken by its workers, and other information.

The team has sought help from foreign consulates; Mann said the Ukrainian consulate in Manhattan provided a list of 28 Ukrainian organizations in New Jersey that help immigrants.

The map may turn out to exist only online. The problem with printing it, Mann said, is that many of the social-service agencies are struggling to survive.

"We're not sure if we want to produce a paper guide at this point," she said. "These organizations are dropping like flies in this economy. And it seems almost worse to have something committed to paper that isn't valid."

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