

2024

# CERTIFIED WELCOMING COUNTY: EMBRACING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY

## IMMIGRANT INCLUSION STRATEGIC PLAN



COUNTY OF SAN MATEO

Developed by the Office of Community Affairs

# A MESSAGE FROM SAN MATEO COUNTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE, MIKE CALLAGY

Dear San Mateo County Community,

We've always considered San Mateo County a welcoming and inclusive community. We welcome newcomers, support those who choose to live and work here and stand united against hate in all forms. With great pride, I share that those basic tenets of our strong and wonderful county have been formally recognized by Welcoming America. We also have the unique distinction of being the first county to join cities nationwide with the honor.

As part of that recognition and our ongoing work to promote inclusivity, diversity, and unity, the County of San Mateo presents its first Immigrant Inclusion Strategic Plan. This document you are holding — the culmination of hours of work since 2020 from numerous individuals not only from the County of San Mateo but also residents and partners who shared critical information through surveys of 2,800 people and gatherings about how best to open our arms and serve all — is a living blueprint for the future. This plan will help form policy, initiatives, and services for consideration while also highlighting the deeper systemic issues that should be addressed.

I am grateful for all the ideas, suggestions, and challenging discussions that resulted in the robust plan you now hold in your hands. While there is certainly never full consensus in the creation of any plan, ours illustrates the way our community can collaborate and find ways to reach a middle ground on matters that far too often breed division and political discord in the nation. I encourage you to take time to absorb the questions raised in this plan, the conclusions drawn, and the thoughts about where we may all go together.

By its definition, being welcome and inclusive is not a sole responsibility for a few but for all. It is also not simply a proclamation or a series of protocols, but daily acts of kindness and responsibility. We all benefit from inclusivity and the growth of our county by welcoming new friends and neighbors, with their innovation, their compassion, their dreams, and their friendship.

San Mateo County is a place to listen, understand and grow. I invite you all to join us on this journey.

Sincerely,

*Mike Callagy*

County Executive Officer



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our county is committed to fostering an environment that embraces diversity and inclusivity, with a particular focus on creating a welcoming atmosphere for immigrants. Recognizing the valuable contributions immigrants bring to our community, we have developed comprehensive strategies to ensure their seamless integration and participation in all aspects of county life.

Designing an effective Immigrant Inclusion Strategic Plan requires a thoughtful and comprehensive approach. The County administered an Immigrant Inclusion Survey (2022) which served as a pivotal tool in understanding and addressing the multifaceted aspects of immigrant inclusion within our community. This survey emerged as a crucial initiative that assessed the experiences, challenges, and successes of individuals who have chosen to make a new home in our midst.

Identifying the biggest barriers and greatest needs is crucial for developing an effective Immigrant Inclusion Strategic Plan. Here is a breakdown based on the survey results:

## Biggest Barriers

- 1** Not aware of services / allowed to participate
- 2** Lack of English language skills
- 3** Poverty / lack of resources
- 4** Fear of risking immigration status
- 5** Affordable Housing

## Top 5 Greatest Needs

- 1** Affordable Housing
- 2** Healthcare Coverage
- 3** Food Assistance
- 4** Educational assistance/ scholarships
- 5** Legal Assistance

The success of an Immigrant Inclusion Strategic Plan relies on the ongoing commitment of the community and organizations involved. By addressing these barriers and needs through targeted strategies, the Immigrant Inclusion Strategic Plan aims to create a more welcoming, inclusive, and supportive environment for the immigrant community. Regular feedback and assessments will be crucial to refining and adapting the plan over time.

# Communication and Continued Learning

The County has an opportunity to increase awareness of resources allowing residents to thrive. With the understanding of San Mateo County’s resources, social infrastructure, and community leadership, we see enormous opportunities to build awareness.

## What can San Mateo County do? We see an opportunity...



**in expanding powerful partnerships to provide critical services.** Work in partnership with stakeholders who are part of the county’s informal and formal support networks to leverage resources and maximize efforts.



**to address barriers to accessing services.** Ensuring that immigrants have knowledge of, and access to, services congruent with their needs, regardless of status, and know where and how to access them (providing linguistically, culturally, and technologically accessible services) is critical.



**to better engage and connect residents with one another and with civic life.** Strengthening connections to civic life, while simultaneously creating critical opportunities to inform decision making, can serve to actively welcome immigrants to engage with their neighbors and community institutions, while promoting inclusiveness and a sense of belonging.

The goals of an Immigrant Inclusion Strategic Plan are designed to create an environment that promotes the integration, well-being, and equal opportunities for immigrants within a community. The goals of this plan include:

-  Enhance immigrant **awareness** of services.
-  Increase **access** to language services to facilitate usage.
-  Coordinate **distribution** of collateral (i.e., affordable housing, food assistance, and healthcare coverage/ mental health care).
-  Promote **immigrant** engagement in civic and public activities.

The County of San Mateo Office of Community Affairs will design and implement two overarching approaches to meet its goals.



Communications, Outreach, and Engagement



Continued Learning to support immigrant inclusion

By prioritizing these opportunities, our county aims to serve as a model for fostering a welcoming and inclusive environment for immigrants who choose to make a home in our county. We believe that embracing diversity enhances the fabric of our community, strengthens our social bonds, and positions us for a vibrant and prosperous future. Our commitment to being a welcoming county is acknowledged by the nationally recognized nonprofit Certified Welcoming with a 4-Star designation.