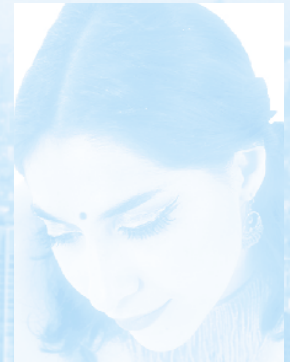


# REBUILDING IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES



A REPORT BY THE  
MAYOR'S OFFICE OF IMMIGRANT AFFAIRS

Michael R. Bloomberg  
Mayor

Sayu V. Bhojwani  
Commissioner  
Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs

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Nearly two years after the attacks of September 11, immigrant communities remain in crisis. The economic and psychological aftereffects of the World Trade Center tragedy have rippled through the concentric circles of New York City residents. The impact has broadened beyond families who lost loved ones to include workers who lost their jobs in lower Manhattan to businesses as far away as Flushing, Queens whose customers have income losses, and South Asian and Arab Americans who are being harassed in schools.

Last Fall, the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs convened community groups and City agencies to discuss ongoing effects of the September 11 attacks on the City's immigrant communities.

A rich and nuanced discussion resulted in this report, which highlights concerns in economic development, employment and housing. The recommendations chart a course for future collaborations among community groups and government. I look forward to working with community organizations and other City agencies to achieve these new collaborations.

Sayu V. Bhojwani  
Commissioner  
Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## INTRODUCTION

### A. Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs

The Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) promotes the full and active participation of immigrant New Yorkers in the political, economic, and civic life of the City by fostering communication and connection between City agencies and immigrant communities. According to the 2000 census, foreign-born persons represent 35.9 percent of New York City's population, and nearly half of the City's total population speaks a language other than English at home. In addition, over 20 percent of New Yorkers are not proficient in English. MOIA specifically seeks to: (1) create access for immigrant communities by promoting the utilization of City services by immigrant New Yorkers; (2) build bridges by facilitating dialogue between City government and immigrant communities; and (3) offer expertise by serving as a key resource to the Mayor and City agencies on addressing the wide range of immigrant related issues. In addition, the City Charter requires MOIA

to ensure that City agencies provide linguistically and culturally appropriate services to immigrants. Since the appointment of the office's first commissioner, Sayu V. Bhojwani, in April 2002, MOIA has expanded its role from being primarily a constituent services office to being a policy-advising and service-coordinating agency. The office has focused on issues and approaches that allow it to have a broader positive impact on New York City's diverse immigrant communities.

Based on dialogues with immigrants, City officials, and community-based organizations, MOIA identified the need for a forum in which decision-makers at City agencies and community-based organizations could meet and discuss issues of particular importance to immigrant communities in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. On October 16, 2002, MOIA hosted a Roundtable meeting addressing three such issues: employment, economic development, and housing. This report summarizes the concerns and suggestions expressed by the meeting participants. (See Appendices A and B for a list of participants)

## **B. September 11 and Immigrant Communities**

The lives of all New Yorkers changed dramatically after the attacks of September 11, 2001. Several studies indicate that immigrant communities were, for a number of reasons, disproportionately affected by the attacks. First, the day-to-day existence of many immigrants before September 11, 2001 was difficult. Much of the work available to many new immigrants is not located in the core sectors of the City's economy. Many of these jobs do not require English proficiency, pay low wages, and may be the first to be cut when businesses suffer. Due to income disparities and lower levels of wealth, immigrants are particularly vulnerable to economic crisis.<sup>1</sup>

In a preexisting climate of economic recession, the destruction of the World Trade Center and the surrounding area had a devastating effect on businesses throughout lower Manhattan and New York City as a whole. With debris covering the streets, pedestrian

and vehicle traffic blocked, and no phone service, businesses throughout lower Manhattan closed for weeks, months, and in many cases for good. As their revenue streams dried up, businesses began to lay off workers. According to the New York City Economic Development Corporation, 93,200 people in New York City have lost their jobs since September 2001. In the weeks that followed, City, state, and federal agencies set up offices within this designated "frozen zone" to enroll displaced residents and workers in disaster relief programs.

Unfortunately, immigrants were often unable to register in these programs. First, many were not proficient in English and were therefore unable to navigate the various applications and aid programs for which they may have qualified. Second, many immigrants displaced by September 11 were unable to satisfy the criteria to receive benefits from federal aid programs, such as providing proof that their source of

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1. The 2000 census reported that the median household income of the foreign-born population was \$38,900, compared to \$42,600 for the native-born population. In addition, immigrant New Yorkers averaged approximately half the net worth of non-immigrant New Yorkers. Fifty-one percent of immigrants in New York had a net worth of \$0 or less, compared to 34% of non-immigrants. Lenna Nepomnyaschy and Irwin Garfinkel, "Wealth in New York City and the Nation: Evidence from the New York Social Indicators Survey

income had been compromised by the tragedy. Immigrants whose employers had paid them on a cash basis, could not produce income statements needed for aid eligibility.

Seema Agnani, Executive Director of Chhaya, stated:

Being paid in cash was a major barrier preventing immigrants from qualifying for financial services. FEMA later changed its policies and began helping those who prior to now were paid in cash. In addition, many immigrants were not aware of the assistance that was available because of language barriers. Although community-based organizations have been doing the necessary outreach to make immigrants aware of the benefits, most of the information

was printed only in the most common languages such as Spanish and Chinese. Thus, it was inaccessible to those who spoke other languages.

The World Trade Center attacks had a particularly great economic impact on Chinatown and all Chinese American communities in the City. Although Chinese immigrants have formed large communities in Brooklyn and Queens, Manhattan's Chinatown is still considered the industrial, residential, commercial, and cultural center of New York City's Chinese American community. Therefore, the massive blow suffered by Chinatown in the months following the attack created deep repercussions on Chinese Americans throughout the City.<sup>2</sup>

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and the Survey of Income and Program Participation," 12 (Columbia School of Social Work Social Indicators Survey Center Working Paper #2-02).

2 As detailed in "Chinatown after September 11: An Economic Impact Study," Asian American Federation of New York, April 4, 2002.



## II. ISSUES

### A. Housing

After September 11, New York City residents faced a range of problems related to housing. Many living in residential areas near Ground Zero had their homes rendered physically uninhabitable. In addition, interest in new residential developments in lower Manhattan plummeted after the attacks. In the months following September 11, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC) was formed and developed the Residential Grant Program designed to retain current residents of lower Manhattan and encourage prospective residents to move into the area through short-term rent or mortgage subsidies.

However, housing issues related to September 11 have not been limited to those who lived close to the World Trade Center. Many immigrants who worked in lower Manhattan but lived elsewhere have faced housing struggles after being laid off. In response to the stress placed on housing as a result of the attacks, the Federal

Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) expanded the guidelines of the Mortgage and Rental Assistance Program (MRA). MRA was designed to “cover rent or mortgage payments for those who have suffered a financial hardship as a result of a major disaster declared by the President. Persons suffering financial hardship who are unable to pay their rent or mortgage, and are facing eviction or foreclosure, may be eligible for this program.”<sup>3</sup>

New York City’s Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) developed the World Trade Center program to assist residents who suffered setbacks in housing because of September 11. During the Roundtable on October 16, 2002, HPD presented an overview of this program and explained how it differed from the larger federal housing assistance programs. The World Trade Center program represented a more focused effort to specifi-

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.fema.gov/diz01/d1391qanda.shtm#whatis>



cally assist displaced low-income workers through Section 8 vouchers.<sup>4</sup> HPD, along with several other City agencies, is responsible for distributing Section 8 vouchers to applicants with sufficiently low incomes to qualify for the subsidy. HPD controls a total of 22,000 Section 8 vouchers. Under its World Trade Center program, HPD allocated approximately 1,000 open Section 8 vouchers to residents who could demonstrate they had worked in lower Manhattan, their income had been within eligibility limits, and their income was significantly reduced in the aftermath of September 11.

As the participants discussed housing needs, community-based organizations raised two issues: access to City and federal housing relief programs should be made easier, and more affordable housing should be developed throughout New York City. With regard to federal programs, it was suggested that the City use its publicity resources to make more immigrants aware of the FEMA programs, and use its intergovernmental lobbyists to push for an extension of existing fed-

eral programs. Participants also asked whether HPD could extend and expand its program. HPD responded that such growth was unlikely for three reasons. First, HPD controlled only a finite number of open Section 8 vouchers and could not enroll more applicants in the program without finding more vouchers. Second, HPD reiterated that it viewed its World Trade Center program as an emergency response program for acute cases. If the program were to grow larger, it would become indistinguishable from standard Section 8 programs, and its preferential placement policies would be unfair to others who had waited far longer periods of time on the general list. Finally, the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) sets certain expected success rates for the Section 8 program and ties additional resources to the accomplishment of these rates. In order to maximize its chances of qualifying for these incentives, HPD tries to be extremely selective with its Section 8 grants; it would be inconsistent with agency policy for HPD to lower its current requirements.

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<sup>4</sup> Section 8 is a federally funded housing subsidy program that provides low-income families the opportunity to choose and lease safe, affordable privately owned rental housing by supplementing what they could afford on their own. <http://www.nyc.gov/html/hpd/html/assistance/section-8-tenant.html#what-is>

Most of the housing needs of immigrants are cases in which the tragedy exacerbated a preexisting challenge such as limited affordable housing in Manhattan and other parts of the City. As an example, a representative of the organization Asian Americans for Equality, described an affordable housing initiative that the organization was developing in Chinatown. Although only 50 apartments were available, more than 4,000 people signed up to be considered for them. Mayor Bloomberg has made housing development a priority for his administration and introduced an extensive housing policy on December 10, 2002. Laurel Blatchford, Senior Policy Advisor to the Deputy Mayor for Economic Development and Rebuilding, expressed her office's interest in working with meeting attendees on affordable housing issues.

## **B. Employment**

To date, 93,200 New Yorkers have lost their jobs due to the events of September 11, 2001. Many others have

experienced a reduction in hours or are earning significantly less than in previous years.<sup>5</sup>

"One-stop" centers, funded by the federal Workforce Investment Act, will serve as the centerpiece of New York City's policy to address unemployment. At a one-stop, government agencies collaborate with private businesses and community organizations to provide free employment services, training, and business opportunities to residents. In a brief overview of the work of the Department of Employment, Commissioner Betty Wu informed meeting attendees that each borough would have at least one one-stop center open within the next year. As of the fall 2002, one center in Jamaica, Queens was open. Commissioner Wu also indicated that because New York City is the last major city to roll out its inclusive job centers, it has had the opportunity to address many of the problems other cities have experienced with their programs. Each site will provide visitors a comprehensive continuum of employment services from

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<sup>5</sup> "A Study of the Ongoing Needs of People Affected by the World Trade Center Disaster: Key Findings and Recommendations," McKinsey & Co./9-11 United Services Group, June 27, 2002, p.3.

unemployment insurance to job training.

Roundtable participants were concerned with the type and quality of services offered at the Queens one-stop center and at other independent job centers throughout New York City. One major concern about existing programs is that they are not always able to provide full services to jobseekers who are not proficient English speakers. For immigrants seeking employment, this challenge could impair their ability to find work. Several attendees also reported that when their clients had been able to access job training and placement services, the jobs for which they were trained were not necessarily as desirable as the ones they previously held, or they were placed in new positions that did not pay them sufficient enough wages.

In addition to commenting on the level of services that will be offered at the new one-stop centers, representatives of several community-based organizations expressed concern about whether WIA funding would allow New York City to effectively address its employment needs. In addition, under current WIA guidelines, one-stop centers might not be able to offer full

services to undocumented immigrants, including English as Second Language (ESL) training. One possible solution would be to draw upon LMDC funds to supplement the employment program.

### **C. Economic Development**

The final issue participants discussed at the meeting was economic development. Although September 11 affected businesses of all sizes, the discussion focused on the specific needs of small businesses. Representatives of the Department of Small Business Services (DSBS) and the Economic Development Corporation (EDC) provided overviews of their services and responses to the disaster. DSBS offers a range of services designed to attract and support businesses in New York City, including economic development in specific neighborhoods, helping small businesses access the City's procurement process, and providing technical assistance to micro-enterprises. Since the September 11 attacks, the agency has devoted a great deal of energy to providing support services to businesses that were affected by the tragedy. EDC has played a central role in New York City's disaster relief

and recovery efforts as the main issuer of two key aid programs for small businesses: business recovery grants and the small firm retention and attraction program. In addition, EDC has created a guide that explains all available forms of disaster assistance and their eligibility requirements. DSBS and EDC work closely together; both expressed interest in collaborating with community-based organizations (CBOs).

Meeting attendees offered several suggestions for citywide economic development, particularly within immigrant communities. One approach emphasized the importance of developing a specific economic sector as a way to broadly benefit communities. In particular, a sector-based approach toward light manufacturing was suggested because it offered jobs that could potentially employ many immigrants. Such jobs would not necessarily require English proficiency, but they

would, in theory, offer a livable wage and a safe work environment. Another proposed model for economic development designed to protect the rights and needs of immigrant workers is a worker-owned business. The Restaurant Opportunities Center of New York informed meeting participants that it is developing a cooperatively owned restaurant in lower Manhattan. If the effort is successful, other immigrant communities interested in economic development programs could employ a similar business model.

One current that ran through most of the proposals was the recognition that immigrants may be particularly vulnerable to exploitation in the workplace. Many attendees stressed that economic development should be carried out in a way that encourages a high degree of respect for employees.

### **III. MAXIMIZING RESOURCES**

In the aftermath of the attacks of September 11, 2001, government agencies, private individuals, and non-profit organizations formed flexible partnerships to provide help where it was needed. Common interests were newly identified and existing rifts were forgotten in light of the tragedy's enormity. In calling together the roundtable on immigrant needs, the Office of Immigrant Affairs hoped that this cooperation and communication would inspire new partnerships and even more effective work on behalf of the newest New Yorkers. The meeting served not only to bring together parties with common interests who had never met, but also to develop a foundation for some concrete initiatives that will hopefully take root in the coming year. The Office of Immigrant Affairs expects to support many of the proposals generated by the meeting, working with community-based organizations and government agencies to ensure their success.

The recommendations proposed at the roundtable have been categorized into three themes: communication and access, creative collaboration, and

advocacy on federal issues.

#### **A. Communication and Access**

Several times during the meeting, representatives of community-based organizations and City agency officials thanked the Office of Immigrant Affairs for bringing concerned parties from both sectors to the same table. The discussions that surrounded such courtesies demonstrated the need for more communication between leading thinkers and decision-makers about their various efforts to provide services to immigrant communities. Many of the most feasible proposals offered during the roundtable revolved around better communication between CBOs and government agencies. In one example, EDC indicated the vast array of languages in which services can be provided at its World Trade Center Rebuilding Center. Representatives of several organizations indicated that had they known how extensive EDC's language support services are, they would have been more confident sending their clients/constituents to the office for help. In another example, the City's Commission on Human Rights informed participants that it offers a mortgage-counsel-

ing program for immigrants. No one else at the meeting had heard of the program, though their clients needed such a service.

During the meeting, Laurel Blatchford from the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Economic Development and Rebuilding, described the Lower Manhattan Public Information Campaign, an effort led by Deputy Mayor Daniel Doctoroff to provide easy, one-stop access to information about lower Manhattan and its rebuilding. The first major initiative of the campaign is the Website at [www.lowermanhattan.info](http://www.lowermanhattan.info). It will soon be complemented by various printed materials and other sources of information. Ms. Blatchford expressed interest in any input that immigrant advocates might provide (through a working group or other format) about how the Website and other source materials could better serve constituents.

The need for improved communication between government agencies and community-based organizations is not limited to the realm of City government. Representatives of several organizations that provide job training and placement described the difficulty they've

had coordinating their outreach with New York State's unemployment insurance program. Although privacy considerations might make it impossible, advocates suggested that if they were given contact information when residents applied for unemployment benefits, they could provide those applicants with informational materials about their services. By reaching people just as they begin to receive unemployment insurance, nonprofits could ensure that unemployed workers receive job training before losing their benefits. Alternatively, New York State could itself send informational materials on behalf of regional job-training programs, with similar results.

### **B. Creative Collaborations**

Also offered at the roundtable were proposals for potential collaborations between the City and community-based organizations that share common interests in affordable housing and improved employment services.

As mentioned in the housing section, the Mayor views the creation of affordable housing as a priority for his administration. Laurel Blatchford said the City is interested in working with nonprofit and private sector organizations that could share the cost of



development, particularly through innovative financing mechanisms. May Chen of UNITE commented that her organization sees the need for affordable housing as paramount, and that it might be willing to finance the construction of affordable housing in partnership with the City. Ms. Chen suggested that UNITE might be able to invest money from its pension fund or the Amalgamated Union Bank. Ms. Blatchford indicated that she would be interested in having preliminary discussions with any organizations on this issue. These projects offer the potential for new models for affordable housing financing that could vastly improve the lives of not only immigrants but of all of New York City's working poor.

Representatives of the participating community-based organizations all viewed ESL training as an essential service that should be more available in New York City. English language proficiency often serves as the bridge between a minimum wage and a living-wage job; without English language skills, it is often impossible to receive important licenses and training. Unfortunately, the Workforce Investment Act that will

fund the Department of Employment's one-stop centers makes it difficult for the DOE to offer ESL classes in their centers. Several participants said they could help fill this gap, because they had both the interest and the human resources to offer ESL classes; however, they had been unable to secure funding for the programs. Most immigrants with limited English proficiency live in a limited number of "immigrant enclave" neighborhoods in Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, and the Bronx. If adequate ESL programs were offered in these neighborhoods, New York City could meet one of the fundamental needs of its immigrant communities.

The final potential collaboration between the City and immigrant advocates would work with LMDC to satisfy the substantial need for ESL classes. (The LMDC holds approximately \$1 billion in unallocated funds). Many participants at the roundtable expressed the desire to see this money used for job training and placement programs in lower Manhattan. Commissioner Bhojwani, Commissioner Wu, and Ms. Blatchford indicated interest in the idea and willingness to work with CBOs to develop a proposal for ESL class-

es that would feed into job placement programs. Such a proposal would be a milestone for innovative government partnership in New York City. If accepted, it would go a long way toward fixing many of the employment problems mentioned in this report.

### **C. Advocacy on Federal Issues**

In the days immediately following September 11, 2001, President Bush promised that the federal government would provide major federal assistance to the massive relief and rebuilding efforts that New York City would face. The Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Small Business Administration spearheaded the federal involvement. Without the federal support, New York City would not have been able to rebound as well as it already has. At the time of writing, many of the application deadlines for federal assistance programs had passed, and most of the available funds had been exhausted or appropriated.

One byproduct of federal involvement in the aftermath of September 11 is that the relationship between the federal government and New York City

has become more apparent and, in many cases, closer. At the roundtable, several community-based organizations suggested that City officials might be able to use this new relationship to push a strong coordinated legislative agenda on the federal level. The impact of federal legislation on New York City's immigrant communities cannot be overestimated. By crafting appropriations with tight eligibility requirements and limited consideration for immigrant needs, federal legislators can monitor the ability of New York City agencies to provide effective services to more than a third of the City's population. For example, as described earlier in this report, the eligibility requirements for FEMA's MRA program made it difficult, and in some cases impossible, for many immigrants economically imperiled by the tragedy to apply for assistance. Without the federal assistance designed to help such individuals survive economically, these individuals become an even greater burden on City agencies already facing personnel cuts and service reductions.

While the deadline for FEMA's MRA program has already passed, participants at the meeting indi-

cated that both New York City and its immigrant communities would benefit from other federal legislation responsive to the needs of immigrants. One example of legislation that New York City should work to see amended is the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). By accounts of several participants, WIA is not fully responsive to the needs of immigrants. As the Act funds the City's major employment-training and job-placement program here, many immigrants may have difficulty in accessing essential employment services.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

At a time when the City is facing one of the worst budget crises in its history, and is home to a more diverse population than ever, partnership between the City and community groups is the best way to maximize the impact of both entities. Collaboration of all the meeting attendees with the Office of Immigrant Affairs can work to eliminate barriers to accessing aid, regaining employment, and maintaining affordable housing faced by the City's immigrants.



## **Appendix A - City Agency Participants**

### **Commission on Human Rights**

Juan Fernandez, Assistant Director of Research  
Division

### **Office of Deputy Mayor Dan Doctoroff**

Laurel Blatchford, Senior Policy Advisor

### **Economic Development Corporation**

Rosalie Tanaka, Vice President of Business  
Development

### **Department of Employment**

Betty Wu, Commissioner

### **Department of Housing Preservation and Development**

Andrew French, Director of Permanent Relocation

### **Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs**

Sayu Bhojwani, Commissioner, and  
Jimmy Yan, General Counsel

### **Department of Small Business Services**

Elizabeth Lusskin, Deputy Commissioner

## **Appendix B - Participating Community Based Organizations**

### **Asian American Federation of New York (AAFNY)**

Parag Khandhar, Assistant Director of Programs  
and Planning

### **Asian Americans for Equality (AAFE)**

Margaret Chin, Deputy Executive Director

### **Chhaya Community Development Corporation**

Seema Agnani, Executive Director

### **Hispanic Federation**

Jose Calderon, Assistant Vice President

### **New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC)**

Chung-Wha Hong, Director of Advocacy, and  
Benjamin Ross, Disaster Relief Coordinator

### **Restaurant Opportunity Center of New York (ROCNY)**

Saru Jayaraman, Executive Director

### **Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE)**

May Chen, Political Director

### **9/11 United Services Group (USG)**

Jack Krauskopf, Executive Director