

# HOW MUNICIPALITIES CAN SUPPORT IMMIGRANTS' RESISTANCE TO INJUSTICE AND OPPRESSION

Society for Community Research & Action, Division 27 of the American Psychological Association

## BACKGROUND

Around the globe, many immigrants experience oppression from local, national, and transnational sources as they migrate and after they settle in their new communities. Oppression is organized and unrelenting, embedded across societies. Immigrants resist oppression by engaging in actions that undermine oppressive power structures. Resistance can be undertaken individually or collectively; targeted at individuals, groups, policies, structures, or systems; and active or passive, organized or unorganized, and overt or covert.

In this brief, we outline ways municipalities may facilitate resistance to oppression.

## MUNICIPALITIES

Municipalities are incorporated communities with a local government. They range from small towns to large cities. Municipalities impact many aspects of their residents' daily lives through the policies they enact and how they enforce them, along with what services they provide and how they provide them. In these ways, municipalities impact the degree of wellbeing enjoyed by their immigrant population.

Municipalities can facilitate resistance through the creation and allocation of resources in their structures, laws, and services, along with the culture they create. Municipalities can create more positive contexts for their immigrant residents by demonstrating openness and sensitivity to diversity in their services. They can create safer spaces by not allowing municipal workers to inquire about immigration status; providing public services to all community members; refusing to allow local law enforcement to participate in immigration enforcement; and providing sanctuary to anyone who requests it in all municipal institutions. Municipalities also can promote resistance to oppression through helping all community members to develop relationships with one another and involving immigrant community members in municipal resources and policy-making. Different municipalities may take divergent approaches; there is no one way to support resistance.

## FRAMEWORKS

Our recommendations are grounded in the framework of **SOCIAL SETTINGS**<sup>1</sup> along with three frameworks:

**EMPOWERING SETTINGS**<sup>2</sup> have a culture of growth and community building; opportunities to take on meaningful, multiple roles; peer-based support; and shared leadership committed to development.

**HEALING JUSTICE**<sup>3</sup> focuses on systems of oppression and calls for structural solutions while attending to suffering, emphasizing a cycle where people build community, develop courageous vision, heal, and act.

**DECOLONIZATION**<sup>4</sup> involves decentering western ways of knowing to resurface ancestral truths and actions, drawing attention to intersectionality and allyship to resist colonialism.

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<sup>1</sup> See Seidman & Tseng, 2011; Tseng & Seidman, 2007, Tseng et al., 2002

<sup>2</sup> See Kieffer, 1984; Maton, 2008; Maton & Brodsky, 2011; Wandersman & Florin, 2000; Wilke & Speer, 2011; Zimmerman, 2000

<sup>3</sup> See Chavez-Diaz & Lee, 2015; Gemignani & Hernández-Albújar, 2019; Ginwright, 2015a, 2015b, 2018; Page, 2013

<sup>4</sup> See Maldonado-Torres, 2016; Tuck & Yang, 2012

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**RECOGNIZE OPPRESSION:** Oppression is carried out individually, collectively, institutionally, and structurally. Oppression can be disguised as the status quo. Stay alert, listen, and look for oppression.

**LOOK FOR RESISTANCE:** Some resistance may be easier to see than others. Be alert to resistance already taking place in your community-based municipality and surrounding community to support it.

**LISTEN AND LEARN:** Look to those who are resisting both within the municipality and outside of the municipality to identify how the municipality might best facilitate resistance. Center the knowledge, experiences, skills, and hopes of those already engaged in resistance work to determine next steps for your municipality.

**LOOK TO MODELS:** Look at municipalities similar to your own to explore how they have facilitated resistance. Chicago, IL, USA is an example of a municipality that is working to change its structures and processes to facilitate resistance. Keep in mind that no municipality is perfect and all are in constant development.

**PROVIDE RESOURCES.** Support resistance by providing resources that your community needs. Build on the existing assets and skills of those in your municipality, particularly those experiencing oppression. Think about the unique resources you can offer. These may include legal aid, housing, or health care; education, information-sharing, or skills development; technical or fiscal support; and/or emotional and social support.

**HARNESS TECHNOLOGY:** Technology can facilitate communication, connection, coordination, and information dissemination. Yet, it can also bring to light acts of resistance not meant for the public eye, putting individuals experiencing oppression at risk. Technology is also unevenly distributed and accessed. Look to those experiencing oppression to consider how technology can support your resistance work.

**USE POWER WISELY:** Recognize and use the unique power and strengths your municipality holds to work toward dismantling oppressive systems.

**MAKE SPACE:** Make sure all voices are heard and their existing knowledge, experiences, and skills are harnessed and equally valued. Decenter Western ways of knowing and challenge structures of white supremacy. Make space for those typically ignored. Those with more power should relinquish that power in their roles and step back. Build community to facilitate resistance.

**HONOR DIVERSE ROLES:** Provide opportunities for all members to take on meaningful and multiple roles, to share leadership, and to grow individually and together. Create ways for members' contributions to evolve over time. Honor and value the diverse roles members undertake, particularly those historically undervalued.

**ACT IN SOLIDARITY:** Those with more power and privilege must be allies, accomplices, and partners to those being oppressed, resisting any internal or external narrative that pushes them to be saviors and to see others through a passive victim lens. Change common individual oppression actions, such as privilege-splaining.

**LOOK IN THE MIRROR:** Reflect on your municipality's structures, processes, and practices to examine ways your municipality may be upholding systems of oppression. Actively work toward dismantling oppression in your municipality. Make sure you are not reproducing the cycle of oppression.

**BE WILLING TO REFLECT AND CHANGE:** In your work, you and your municipality will likely make mistakes. Be open to feedback from those whose resistance your municipality seeks to support. Continuously reflect on what you are doing and why. Be ready to own your actions and make changes accordingly. When your municipality or someone in it is "called in" by those oppressed, view the intervention as an act of love, designed to help the municipality or person do better, as you are viewed as having the capacity to grow.