



Expanding immigration services and leadership across PA:

Executive summary of the *PA is Ready!* three-year evaluation

Context

PA is Ready! is a network and participatory grantmaking fund, consisting of 29 organizations that represent and serve Pennsylvania's diverse immigrant communities. Organizations originally came together around a shared vision in 2014, later creating project partnerships between legal services and community based organizations to provide legal and other immigration services and leadership development statewide. With early support from a national pooled fund and local Pennsylvania funders, the network allocated resources to these collaborative projects through participatory grantmaking.

After three years of grants, partnerships, and projects, *PA is Ready!* reflected on its accomplishments and considered how lessons from its first phase will inform future collaborative work across Pennsylvania.

The model

During its first three years, *PA is Ready!* adopted a distinctive operational model. First, core to its approach is deep collaboration between community based and legal services organizations. Second, it operates a well-developed participatory grantmaking fund. Third, *PA is Ready!* is an adaptive network, fostering relationships and new ideas. Finally, a shared set of core principles steers the work.

"[Our partnerships were] minimal before. *PA is Ready!* really got us to a level that we did not have. We had [some] connections, but all we were doing before *PA is Ready!* was serving people... Eyes were opened because we joined. Where we're at now is 100 times where we were before."



Achievements

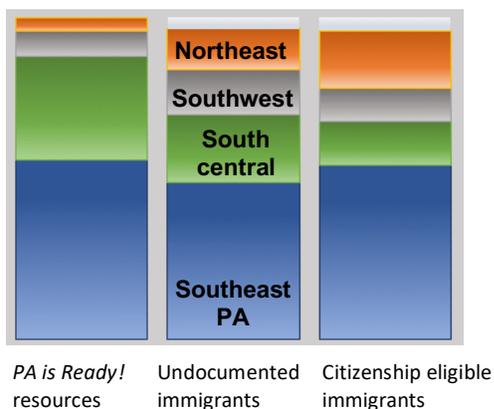
During two and a half years of operational projects, **a community member accessed basic education on immigrants' rights and legal options 8,000 times.** *PA is Ready!* projects offered over 400 legal clinics and screening or information sessions; **conducted 3,000 comprehensive legal screenings; and completed 740 applications.**

PA is Ready! aims to foster leadership among immigrant and refugee community members. Projects engaged community leaders as volunteers and in trainings on over 600 occasions. In addition, **88 leaders received in-depth training through the Community Navigator curriculum,** on how to educate others on their rights, prepare Deportation Defense Packets, conduct comprehensive

legal screenings, and assist with naturalization applications.

Survey respondents rated their organizations' services before involvement and as of January 2019; most perceived an **increase in quantity and/or quality of services**. Over 70% noted that *PA is Ready!* services aligned with community needs *well* or *very well*.

***PA is Ready!* resources are allocated across PA, reaching immigrant communities where they live**



PA is Ready! also invests in organizations' capacity and infrastructure, such as staffing, staff skills, and volunteer management. Partners were asked to rate their capacity and infrastructure before involvement in the network and at the time of the survey. **Over half of respondents reported an increase in capacity and infrastructure**. Interviews revealed that smaller organizations (under ten staff) were especially likely to observe an increase in capacity.

One intended outcome of *PA is Ready!* is an increase in both informal and formal partnerships among network organizations. Members believe it is valuable to create space for new ideas, new alliances, and new projects to emerge organically. The vast majority of respondents – 93% – reported an increase in number of partnerships since they began involvement in *PA is Ready!* On average, **the number of formal and informal partnerships more than doubled** over this period.

“An exciting example of what can be achieved when you involve communities in decision making and empower people who are the end users. A great model when we [as a funder] think about how to convene communities.”

The review also revealed benefits of the participatory grantmaking model. In partner organization and funder surveys, more than **80% described the fund's grant decisions as more responsive to community needs than average grant decisions**.

The next chapter

The network's three-year evaluation uncovered **measurable improvements in available services and leadership development** as well as qualitative data on what this growth means for community leaders, organization staff, and supporters. At the same time, it surfaced themes for further attention and development, many of which are common growth areas for early-stage networks and funds. It also highlighted **opportunities for further investment — to fully deploy accessible services across the state as well as to maintain a healthy, collaborative network**. In its next chapter, *PA is Ready!* is poised to build on its early successes and lessons learned with a refined vision for services and systems change led by immigrant and refugee communities across Pennsylvania.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR *PA IS READY!*

- Continue to invest time and resources in **fostering an adaptable, connected network**
- Improve **information flows** across the network and increase **strategic external communication**
- Further develop **capacity building** opportunities for individual leaders and organizations
- **Expand the fund** to fully support service delivery across the state