

## KEY FINDINGS

# LET'S TALK, MARATHON COUNTY

## How Do We Manage Immigration In Our Country?

### Immigration Deliberative Dialogues

**November 19, 2024**

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## BACKGROUND

### GOALS OF LET'S TALK, MARATHON COUNTY

In the fall of 2023, the Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service (WIPPS) launched the Let's Talk, Marathon County project.<sup>1</sup> Like much of America, Central Wisconsin is beset by political division, magnified by digital media, which often portrays citizens in a constant state of disagreement around public issues with a shrinking middle ground. Social and popular media offer podiums to the loudest, most persistent voices, which typically represent the opposite poles of the political spectrum. However, research shows that most Americans do not fall neatly into one political party or ideology.<sup>2</sup>

Let's Talk, Marathon County is aimed at fostering constructive conversations among residents on a variety of public issues. It aims to give a voice to those whose thoughts and ideas have been overshadowed by dominant and polarizing narratives. By bringing together individuals from different backgrounds and viewpoints, this program seeks to create an inclusive space where all voices are heard, valued, and respected. The broader goals of Let's Talk, Marathon County are:

- 1. Create spaces for residents of central Wisconsin to address issues that matter in a civil and constructive manner.**
- 2. Build and sustain a community culture of civil dialogue around important issues.**
- 3. Improve feelings of trust among fellow residents despite differences in viewpoints.**
- 4. Train local facilitators with capacity to moderate future deliberative dialogues.**

Let's Talk, Marathon County was selected as one of 32 grantees for the Healing Starts Here initiative, a nationwide effort to address and understand divisive forces in communities and promote healing. This initiative is fully funded by New Pluralists, an organization committed to helping Americans recognize our shared humanity, embrace our differences, and solve challenges together.<sup>3</sup> WIPPS was chosen from a pool of almost 800 applicants, and no taxpayer dollars were used for this project.

### WHAT ARE DELIBERATIVE DIALOGUES?

The Let's Talk conversations use a deliberative dialogue process to facilitate conversations among community members. Deliberation—sometimes called “choice work”—is a way for the public to weigh together various approaches to solving problems and find courses of action consistent with what communities and individuals hold valuable. Deliberation is more than simply raising and discussing important issues in a public setting. Genuine public deliberation is a thoughtful public process by which communities and stakeholders learn from one another and strive to come to judgment together about real policy matters.<sup>4</sup>

This form of public dialogue is not far removed from what citizens, including elected officials, routinely do every day. However, constructive dialogue is frequently drowned out by incivility and hyper-politicization of issues in public spaces. Advocates of deliberation seek to grow the practice so that public deliberation becomes a healthy and realistic way to create spaces for individuals and communities to work through complex issues and come to common ground on difficult policy choices. Deliberation is, therefore, public work—that is, work by the public, for public purposes.

<sup>1</sup> <https://wipps.org/lets-talk/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/11/09/beyond-red-vs-blue-the-political-typology-2/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://newpluralists.org/>

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Yankelovich, Daniel, and Will Friedman, eds. *Toward Wiser Public Judgment*. Vanderbilt University Press, 2010. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv17vf70s>.

While public deliberation will not address or solve all community problems (nor erase fundamental conflicts in values), it remains an important component of healthy democratic practice and an avenue for residents to become involved in public policy. It also offers a vehicle for individuals to learn more about complex issues and the real tradeoffs that different approaches to community problems entail.

### SELECTING THE LET’S TALK, MARATHON COUNTY PANEL

The Let’s Talk, Marathon County team assembled a participant panel of nearly 100 community members from across Marathon County to meet in small groups of approximately 10 people per group over the course of two years and to engage in conversations about public issues. To date, the conversations have focused on several topics, including youth mental health; homelessness; and immigration. The goal was to select a panel of community members who reflected a range of political affiliations and ensured geographic representation of residents from rural and urban areas of the county, as well as a cross-section of demographics. The following process was used to populate the panel:

- A community-wide public marketing campaign using a combination of media and social media resources, as well as informal networking and outreach to individuals and organizations across the county, was launched in the spring of 2023. Interested individuals were asked to sign up via an online application. In addition to collecting the individual’s name, the application also asked standard demographic questions, including the individual’s political leaning. Following this campaign, we received 259 unique applications.<sup>5</sup>
- Following the initial recruitment, a random selection process (weighted by political leaning to ensure balance) was used to whittle down the list to 127 applicants. A follow-up survey was sent via email to the 127 applicants to verify that they were residents of Marathon County. We received valid and affirmative responses from 91 of the 127. Additional recruitment helped increase the racial, geographic, and political diversity in the panel.
- The exact number of individuals in the Let’s Talk panel at any given time fluctuates due to occasional attrition, as well as from new panelists being added. For example, a few panelists have dropped out for personal reasons such as moving out of the area. When a panel member leaves, project staff attempt to add a new panel member with a similar political affiliation and geographic representation (urban or rural). As of the time that the immigration dialogues were conducted, there were 92 Let’s Talk panelists.

Table 2 on the following page shows the political affiliation, geographic residence, and demographic characteristics of the Let’s Talk panel, along with the characteristics of the panelists who participated in immigration deliberative dialogues. The self-reported political affiliation of the 92 Let’s Talk panelists reflected a distribution of approximately 30% liberal, 40% moderate, and 30% conservative. In creating these categories, we aggregated responses as shown below in Table 1.

**Table 1. Let’s Talk Panel Political Affiliation Categories**

Aggregation of Self-Reported Leaning							
Liberal		Moderate				Conservative	
Very liberal	Moderately liberal	Slightly liberal	Middle of the road	Neither liberal nor conservative	Slightly conservative	Moderately conservative	Very conservative

The panel for the immigration dialogues reflected a geographic distribution of approximately 74% urban and 26% rural.<sup>6</sup> About 52% selected “woman” as their gender; 42% selected “man,” with 5% selecting “other” or “prefer not to respond.” About one-third (36%) were age 60+ (20% of the county population is age 65+). The vast majority were white (86%), which is similar to the county (87%).<sup>7</sup> Four percent (4%) were Asian and nine percent (9%) reported Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, generally comparable to county data (4%). The panelists reflected higher educational attainment in comparison to the county, with about 23% having a master’s degree or professional degree compared to about 8% in the county’s population.

<sup>5</sup> This number reflects the total individuals after the registration data were cleaned to remove possible spam.

<sup>6</sup> This distribution reflects approximate population density in Marathon County by Census Tract.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.marathoncountypulse.org/index.php?module=DemographicData&controller=index&action=index>

**Table 2. Let's Talk Panel Characteristics Compared to Deliberative Dialogue Participants**

	Let's Talk Panel	Let's Talk Panel	Dialogue Participants	Dialogue Participants
	N	%	N	%
	<b>92</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Political Affiliation</b>				
Liberal	27	29	15	28
Moderate	39	42	24	45
Conservative	26	28	14	26
<b>Geography</b>				
Urban	68	74	37	70
Rural	24	26	16	30
No response	0	0	0	0
<b>Age</b>				
16-20	1	1	1	2
21-29	9	10	3	6
30-39	20	22	7	13
40-49	14	15	8	15
50-59	14	15	9	17
60-69	17	19	13	25
70+	16	17	12	23
Prefer not to answer/no response	1	1	0	0
<b>Gender</b>				
Woman	48	52	31	59
Man	39	42	20	38
Other	3	3	2	4
Prefer not to answer/no response	2	2	0	0
<b>Race (Select all that apply)</b>				
Alaskan, American Indian, Indigenous, or Native American	4	4	0	0
Asian	4	4	3	6
Black or African American	3	3	1	2
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	0	0	0
White	79	86	48	92
One or more not listed	1	1	0	0
Prefer not to answer/no response	5	6	2	4
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
Hispanic/Latino	8	9	3	6
Not Hispanic/Latino	84	91	50	94
Prefer not to answer/no response	0	0	0	0
<b>Highest Level of Education</b>				
Some high school	1	1	0	0
High school graduate/GED	8	9	5	9
Nontraditional education	0	0	0	0
Trade school	1	1	0	0
Some college, no degree	15	16	10	19
Associate degree	15	16	7	13
Bachelor's degree	27	29	16	30
Master's degree	17	19	10	19
Professional degree	4	4	2	4
Prefer not to answer/no response	4	4	3	6

\* Percentages might not add up to exactly 100% because of rounding. For race, numbers can add up to more than the group sample size because respondents were asked to select all options that applied to them.

## IMMIGRATION DELIBERATIVE DIALOGUES

Eight deliberative dialogues were conducted on the topic of *How Should We Manage Immigration in Our Country?* These dialogues were held in three locations in Wausau, as well as in the villages of Marathon City and Mosinee; two dialogues were held virtually. Within each dialogue, the goal was to include approximately 10 Let’s Talk panelists (or 80 total participants). In addition, each dialogue was structured to reflect a distribution of approximately 30% liberal, 40% moderate, and 30% conservative participants. With 10 participants for each dialogue, therefore, the goal was to include 3 liberal, 4 moderate, and 3 conservative-leaning individuals. To accomplish this, the 92 Let’s Talk panelists were divided into three groups according to the panelists’ self-reported political affiliation. Each of the three groups was sent a unique dialogue sign-up link with the dates of the various sessions. This allowed participants to choose a date and location convenient to them while allowing the project team to manage political affiliation representation within each dialogue.

During this round of deliberative dialogues, a total of 56 of the 92 Let’s Talk panelists registered to participate; after accounting for cancelations and no-shows, a total of 53 individuals participated in one of the immigration dialogues. As shown previously in Table 2, the demographics of the participants were not materially different from the Let’s Talk panel as whole. Panelists who were unable to participate will have a chance to do so in the next round of deliberative dialogues. As a recruitment incentive and as a token of appreciation for their time, each participant received a \$100 gift card.

**Table 3. Immigration Deliberative Dialogue Participants**

Community Member Deliberative Dialogues						
Political Affiliation	Let’s Talk Panelists	Percent (%)	Registered for Dialogue	Percent (%)	Participated in Dialogue	Percent (%)
Liberal	27	29	16	29	15	28
Moderate	39	42	25	45	24	45
Conservative	26	28	15	27	14	26
<b>Total</b>	<b>92<sup>8</sup></b>	<b>100</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100</b>

Of the 53 Let’s Talk panel members who participated in the immigration dialogues, 48 (91%) had participated in at least one prior Let’s Talk dialogue on the topic of youth mental health or homelessness; 5 (9%) were first-time participants.

## THE ISSUE GUIDE

In order to structure the dialogues, the project partners created a detailed issue guide that “named and framed” this topic (see Appendix C), using an issue guide originally developed by the National Issues Forum as a foundation.<sup>9</sup> The issue guide was provided to the participants at the start of each dialogue and consisted of background information on the topic, including a curated page of national statistics on immigration. In addition, the issue guide outlined three potential approaches to the topic of managing immigration, including (1) welcome immigrants and be a beacon of freedom; (2) enforce the law and be fair to those who follow the rules; and (3) slow down immigration and focus on common bonds.

For each of the three approaches, the issue guide provided potential actions as well as possible drawbacks or tradeoffs. Trained moderators facilitated the dialogues by carefully examining each approach, including weighing trade-offs among the action items and identifying areas of tension as well as common ground. A public notetaker assisted in recording the results of the dialogues. At least one formal observer was present at each dialogue to capture key themes and takeaways as well. The dialogues were conducted largely in person and were scheduled for approximately 120 minutes (two sessions were held virtually).

<sup>8</sup> Of the 92 Let’s Talk immigration panelists, 24 (26%) had not participated in any of the dialogues; 14 (15%) had participated in 1 dialogue; 17 (18%) had participated in 2 dialogues; and 37 (40%) had participated in 3 dialogues.

<sup>9</sup> See <https://www.nifi.org/>

A glossary of terms was also shared with participants. See Appendix D. As with most sensitive topics, the language used to discuss immigration can be highly charged. People use different terms for the same concept and even official agencies do not always agree on what is encompassed by a particular definition. At the start of each dialogue, the moderator informed the participants that they themselves would be using the term “unauthorized” when referring to individuals in the country illegally or without documentation. This term was selected to be more neutral and less partisan. However, participants were not instructed as to which term they should use, nor were they prevented from or asked to refrain from using alternate terminology.

## EVALUATION APPROACH

There were two components to the evaluation of the immigration dialogues: (1) a post-dialogue survey was administered to all of the participants at the conclusion of each dialogue in order to get feedback on the dialogue process from the participants’ perspective; and (2) detailed summaries were prepared of each individual dialogue in order to document the content and nature of each group’s discussion and to identify key themes across dialogues. This report, *Let’s Talk Key Findings–Immigration Deliberative Dialogues*, includes the findings from the post-dialogue survey and the key themes across dialogues. A supplemental report, *Let’s Talk Supplemental Report–Immigration Deliberative Dialogue Summaries*, includes the individual dialogue summaries. In the *Let’s Talk Key Findings–Immigration Deliberative Dialogues* report, we followed an approach of using the term “unauthorized immigrant” in the narrative. The *Let’s Talk Supplemental Report–Immigration Deliberative Dialogue Summaries* used the terms as they were reflected and captured in the notes.

## NEW SPANISH LANGUAGE DELIBERATIVE DIALOGUES

In an effort to be inclusive of a broad range of community members’ perspectives, beginning with the immigration dialogues, the Let’s Talk team assembled a new mini-panel consisting of 22 Hispanic community members. All of these individuals had limited English language proficiency and therefore the dialogues were conducted in Spanish. Two (2) in-person Spanish language dialogues were held in Wausau on the topic of immigration. Comparable methods were used for conducting these dialogues, including translating the issue guide and post-dialogue survey tool into Spanish. We had limited information on the political-leaning of these individuals and the vast majority were rural community members and male. Because the Let’s Talk panel is intended to be reasonably representative of the county, we did not want to skew the main panel characteristics by merging the mini-panelists’ demographic data or the post-dialogue survey responses with the main Let’s Talk panel. Appendix B provides more information about the demographic characteristics of the Hispanic community member mini-panelists, as well as a summary of the responses to the post-dialogue survey. We include insights from the Spanish language dialogues in the section of this report which summarizes the Let’s Talk dialogue participants’ views of the approaches and action items. The *Let’s Talk Supplemental Report–Immigration Deliberative Dialogue Summaries* includes the individual dialogue summaries for the 2 Spanish language sessions. Moderator and observer notes taken during the Spanish language sessions were translated into English and were provided to the research team for inclusion in this report.

## RESOURCES

As a courtesy to readers interested in more information, we have provided some below information about local and other organizations addressing immigration and/or assisting immigrants, including refugees. This list is not intended to be an exhaustive list or representative of all community resources.

- ACLU Wisconsin - <https://www.aclu.org/know-your-rights/immigrants-rights>
- Catholic Charities of the Diocese of La Crosse (they have offices in Wausau that provide related services such as housing. There is an office in La Crosse does provide immigration services) - <https://cclse.org/immigration/>
- ECDC Multicultural Community Center - <https://www.ecdcus.org/>
- Forward Service Corporation Refugee Services - <https://fsc-corp.org/program/refugee-services/>
- Forward Service Corporation Wausau Locations - [https://fsc-corp.org/locations/?\\_sfm\\_wpsl\\_county=Marathon](https://fsc-corp.org/locations/?_sfm_wpsl_county=Marathon)
- Hmong American Center - <https://www.hmongamericancenter.org/>

- Hmong and Hispanic Communication Network (H2N) - <https://wipps.org/programs/h2n/>
- HOLA - <https://holawisc.org/>
- Latinx Advocate (provides specialized services to Spanish speaking victims of sexual and domestic abuse, labor and sex trafficking victims, offered through The Women’s Community) - [www.womenscommunity.org](http://www.womenscommunity.org)
- Migrant Project (helps migrant, seasonal farmworkers or dairy workers with civil legal problems, through Legal Action of Wisconsin) - [www.legalaction.org](http://www.legalaction.org)
- Marathon County Literacy Council - <https://mclitofwausau.org/>
- New Beginnings for Refugees Wausau - <https://newbeginningswi.org/>
- Northcentral Technical College English Language Learning - <https://www.ntc.edu/academics-training/english-language-learning>
- Southeast Asian Program (provides specialized services to Southeast Asian victims of sexual and domestic abuse, labor and sex trafficking victims, offered through The Women’s Community) - [www.womenscommunity.org](http://www.womenscommunity.org)
- U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (formerly Immigration & Naturalization Service)  
[www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis](http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis)
- Wausau Free Clinic - <https://www.wausaufreeclinic.com/>
- Wisconsin DCF Refugee Resettlement Agencies - <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/refugee/resettlement-agencies>
- Wisconsin Job Center - Directory of Workforce Services (can click on Marathon County to view employment and training services that include English as a Second Language (ESL) - <https://www.wisconsinjobcenter.org/>



# PANELISTS' VIEWS OF THE DELIBERATIVE DIALOGUES

At the conclusion of each deliberative dialogue, participants were asked to complete a brief, 20-question survey about their experiences engaging in the deliberative dialogue. The questions were designed to gather information about whether the dialogues expanded participants' views on the issue; helped them consider tradeoffs and solutions; increased appreciation for diverse viewpoints; and increased interest in engaging in community issues. A QR code was available at the dialogue to allow participants to scan and complete the survey on their devices, and paper copies were also available. Participants in virtual dialogues were provided with a survey link.

In this section of the report, we summarize the key findings from the post-dialogue surveys for the Let's Talk dialogues on immigration. For reference, participants' responses were further separated into rural versus urban respondents. Although the data in the tables can be used to observe the general patterns of responses, given the relatively small sample sizes, we often combined response categories when discussing results. In addition, tests of the statistical significance of the differences between groups were not conducted. Therefore, we do not make direct comparisons of the differences between the urban versus rural respondents. It is unlikely that the results in any one cell are significantly different from the results for that same cell for another group. As such, the data should not be used to draw conclusions about the magnitude of differences between urban versus rural respondents. Responses to two open-ended survey questions are included in Appendix A.

## SURVEY RESPONSE RATES

Table 4 below shows the survey response rates. Overall, 100% of dialogue participants completed the survey.

**Table 4. Immigration Deliberative Dialogues – Participant Survey Response Rates**

Community Member Deliberative Dialogues			
Political Affiliation	Dialogue Participants	Completed Post-Dialogue Surveys	Response Rate (%)
Liberal	15	15	100
Moderate	24	24	100
Conservative	14	14	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100</b>
Urban	37	37	100
Rural	16	16	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100</b>

## SURVEY RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Table 5 shows the demographic characteristics of the dialogue participants in comparison to the survey respondents. Since all of the dialogue participants completed the survey, there are no differences between the respondents and the participating panelists. The table also provides the characteristics of the rural and urban respondents. However, because of the small group sizes (16 rural and 37 urban respondents) we do not make direct comparisons between the two groups.

**Table 5. Let's Talk Deliberative Dialogue Participant versus Survey Respondent Characteristics**

	Dialogue Participants	Dialogue Participants	Survey Respondents	Survey Respondents	Urban Survey Respondents	Urban Survey Respondents	Rural Survey Respondents	Rural Survey Respondents
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
	53	100	53	100	37	100	16	100
<b>Political Affiliation</b>								
Liberal	15	28	15	28	6	16	9	56
Moderate	24	45	24	45	20	54	4	25
Conservative	14	26	14	26	11	30	3	19
<b>Geography</b>								
Urban	37	70	37	70	37	100	0	0
Rural	16	30	16	30	0	0	16	100
<b>Age</b>								
16-20	1	2	1	2	1	3	0	0
21-29	3	6	3	6	2	5	1	6
30-39	7	13	7	13	7	19	0	0
40-49	8	15	8	15	4	11	4	25
50-59	9	17	9	17	6	16	3	19
60-69	13	25	13	25	10	27	3	19
70+	12	23	12	23	7	19	5	31
Prefer not to answer/no response	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Gender</b>								
Woman	31	59	31	59	21	57	10	62
Man	20	38	20	38	14	38	6	38
Other	2	4	2	4	2	5	0	0
Prefer not to answer/no response	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Race (Select all that apply)</b>								
Alaskan, American Indian, Indigenous, or Native American	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Asian	3	6	3	6	3	8	0	0
Black or African American	1	2	1	2	1	3	0	0
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
White	48	92	48	92	32	87	16	100
One or more not listed	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Prefer not to answer/no response	2	4	2	4	1	3	0	0
<b>Ethnicity</b>								
Hispanic/Latino	3	6	3	6	3	8	0	0
Not Hispanic or Latino	50	94	50	94	34	92	16	100
No response	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Highest Level of Education</b>								
Some high school	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
High school graduate/GED	5	9	5	9	5	14	0	0
Nontraditional education	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Trade school	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Some college, no degree	10	19	10	19	8	22	2	13
Associate degree	7	13	7	13	7	19	0	0
Bachelor's degree	16	30	16	30	11	30	5	31
Master's degree	10	19	10	19	4	11	6	38
Professional degree	2	4	2	4	0	0	2	13
Prefer not to answer/no response	3	6	3	6	2	5	1	6

\* Percentages might not add up to exactly 100% because of rounding. For race, numbers can add up to more than the group sample size because respondents were asked to select all options that applied to them.

## CONSIDER TRADEOFFS AND SOLUTIONS

The dialogues helped participants consider trade-offs and solutions to the issue of how to manage immigration in the country, as well as to evaluate the pros and cons of potential actions and solutions.

- A majority of Let’s Talk panelists who participated in the dialogues reported that the dialogue helped them better understand the issue they discussed and also helped them to evaluate the pros and cons of potential solutions to managing immigration in the country. Sixty-three percent (63%) of community members reported that participating in the dialogue helped them better understand the issue “quite a bit” or a “great deal” and 63% reported that the dialogue helped them evaluate the pros and cons of potential solutions “quite a bit” or “a great deal.”

Table 6. Understanding Issues and Considering Tradeoffs

How much did today’s dialogue...	Not at all ↓	A little ↓	Some ↓	Quite a bit ↓	A great deal ↓
<b>...help you better understand the issue that you discussed? (%)</b>					
Let’s Talk Panelists	0	8	29	46	17
Rural	0	12	25	62	0
Urban	0	6	31	39	25
<b>...help you evaluate the pros and cons of various potential solutions to the issue that you discussed? (%)</b>					
Let’s Talk Panelists	0	10	27	40	23
Rural	0	6	44	38	12
Urban	0	11	19	42	28

At least half of the participants reported at least some disagreement among the panelists, yet nearly all identified at least some common ground among the participants on the topic of immigration.

- Sixteen percent (16%) of participants reported “quite a bit” or “a great deal” of disagreement among the participants, with an additional 38% reporting “some” disagreement. When these three response categories are combined, more than half of respondents (54%) reported at least a moderate amount of disagreement among the panelists.
- About 70% reported “quite a bit” or “a great deal” of common ground; about one-fourth (24%) reported “some” common ground among the dialogue participants. When these three response categories are combined, 94% of the participants reported at least some common ground among the participants.

Table 7. Levels of Disagreement and Common Ground

Thinking overall about today’s dialogue...	None ↓	A little ↓	Some ↓	Quite a bit ↓	A great deal ↓
<b>...how much disagreement was there among the participants? (%)</b>					
Let’s Talk Panelists	10	36	38	14	2
Rural	12	31	38	20	0
Urban	8	39	39	11	3
Thinking overall about today’s dialogue...	None ↓	A little ↓	Some ↓	Quite a bit ↓	A great deal ↓
<b>...how much common ground was there among the participants? (%)</b>					
Let’s Talk Panelists	0	6	24	47	23
Rural	0	6	31	50	12
Urban	0	5	22	46	27

## EXPAND VIEWS ON AN ISSUE

The dialogues helped community members expand their views on the issue of how to manage immigration in the country.

- When asked to think about the dialogue in which they participated, 51% of community members reported that they considered perspectives or viewpoints they hadn't considered before "quite a bit" or "a great deal." About 40% thought that the other participants had considered perspectives or viewpoints they hadn't considered before "quite a bit" or "a great deal." Nearly one-third (32%) reported that they considered perspectives or viewpoints they hadn't considered before "some"; 48% reported they felt their fellow participants considered these "some."
- Eighty-seven percent (87%) responded that they valued the input provided by the other participants "quite a bit" or "a great deal"; 50% felt that their input was valued "quite a bit" or "a great deal" by the other participants.

Table 8. Considering New Perspectives

Thinking overall about today's dialogue...	Not at all ↓	A little ↓	Some ↓	Quite a bit ↓	A great deal ↓
<b>...how much did you personally consider perspectives or viewpoints that you hadn't considered before? (%)</b>					
Let's Talk Panelists	6	11	32	40	11
Rural	0	12	25	56	6
Urban	8	11	35	32	14
<b>...how much do you think the other participants considered perspectives or viewpoints that they hadn't considered before? (%)</b>					
Let's Talk Panelists	2	10	48	36	4
Rural	0	20	53	27	0
Urban	3	5	46	40	5
<b>...how much did you value the input provided by the other participants? (%)</b>					
Let's Talk Panelists	0	2	11	57	30
Rural	0	0	25	31	44
Urban	0	3	5	68	24
<b>...how much do you think the other participants valued the input you provided? (%)</b>					
Let's Talk Panelists	0	11	40	42	8
Rural	0	12	38	44	6
Urban	0	11	40	40	8

The dialogues were characterized by high levels of respect, including for those with differing views.

- About two-thirds (64%) of dialogue participants reported that those with differing views acted "very respectfully" toward one another. Respondents noted that participants treated those with similar views "very respectfully" (77%).

Table 9. Understanding Issues and Considering Tradeoffs

During today's dialogue...	Very disrespectfully ↓	Somewhat disrespectfully ↓	Neutral ↓	Somewhat respectfully ↓	Very respectfully ↓
<b>...how did participants with differing views act toward one another? (%)</b>					
Let's Talk Panelists	0	8	17	11	64
Rural	0	0	19	6	75
Urban	0	11	16	14	60
<b>...how did participants with similar views act toward one another? (%)</b>					
Let's Talk Panelists	0	0	10	14	77
Rural	0	0	6	6	88
Urban	0	0	11	17	72

## APPRECIATE DIVERSE VIEWPOINTS AND DECREASE “DEMONIZATION” OF THOSE WITH DIFFERING VIEWS

**The dialogues helped participants appreciate diverse viewpoints and develop greater comfort with and trust in fellow community members with differing views.**

- About two-thirds (66%) of the community members reported that participating in the dialogues made them value viewpoints on the issue that differ from theirs “somewhat more” or “much more” than before the dialogue.
- Seventy-four percent (74%) reported being “somewhat more” or “much more” comfortable interacting with members of their community who hold different viewpoints from theirs than before the dialogue.
- When asked about how trusting they feel towards community members who hold viewpoints that differ from theirs, 57% reported that they were “somewhat more” or “much more” trusting than before the dialogue. About 40% reported no change.
- Sixty-four percent (64%) of the community members reported being “somewhat more” or “much more” connected to community members who hold viewpoints that differ from their own than before the dialogue.

**The dialogues increased participants’ confidence that their community can engage in civil conversations.**

- A large majority (88%) of community members reported that participating in the dialogue made them “somewhat more” or “much more” confident that their community can engage in civil conversations about the issue they discussed.

**Table 10. Trust, Comfort, and Connectivity as a Result of Participation**

Coming out of today’s dialogue...	Much less than before ↓	Somewhat less than before ↓	No change ↓	Somewhat more than before ↓	Much more than before ↓
<b>...how much do you value viewpoints on the issue that differ from yours? (%)</b>					
Let’s Talk Panelists	0	6	28	49	17
Rural	0	6	25	56	12
Urban	0	5	30	46	19
<b>...how comfortable do you feel interacting with members of your community who hold viewpoints on the issue that differ from yours? (%)</b>					
Let’s Talk Panelists	0	0	26	51	23
Rural	0	0	25	56	19
Urban	0	0	27	49	24
<b>...how trusting do you feel toward members of your community who hold viewpoints on the issue that differ from yours? (%)</b>					
Let’s Talk Panelists	0	4	40	49	8
Rural	0	6	44	50	0
Urban	0	3	38	49	11
<b>...how connected do you feel to members of your community who hold viewpoints on the issue that differ from yours? (%)</b>					
Let’s Talk Panelists	0	2	34	55	9
Rural	0	0	31	69	0
Urban	0	3	35	49	14
<b>...how confident are you that your community can engage in civil conversations about the issue you discussed? (%)</b>					
Let’s Talk Panelists	0	4	8	58	30
Rural	0	6	12	62	19
Urban	0	3	5	57	35

## INCREASE ENGAGEMENT IN COMMUNITY ISSUES AND INTEREST IN MAKING A DIFFERENCE

In general, participants reported an increased interest in learning more about the issue of immigration and an increased interest in engaging with fellow community members about the topic.

- When considering the percentage of community members who selected “quite a bit” or “a great deal,” 68% reported that participating in the dialogues made them want to learn more about the issue they discussed; talk more with fellow community members about the issue (57%); collaborate more with fellow community members (59%); and be more involved in decision-making in their community about the issue (67%).

**Table 11. Interest and Engagement in Community Issues**

Did participating in today's dialogue make you want to...	Not at all ↓	A little ↓	Some ↓	Quite a bit ↓	A great deal ↓
<b>...learn more about the issue you discussed? (%)</b>					
Let's Talk Panelists	2	0	30	42	26
Rural	0	0	19	44	38
Urban	3	0	35	40	22
<b>...talk more with your fellow community members about the issue you discussed? (%)</b>					
Let's Talk Panelists	0	6	36	36	21
Rural	0	7	40	40	13
Urban	0	4	35	35	24
<b>...collaborate with your fellow community members to address the issue you discussed? (%)</b>					
Let's Talk Panelists	0	9	32	38	21
Rural	0	6	50	25	19
Urban	0	11	24	43	22
<b>...be more involved with decision-making in your community about the issue you discussed? (%)</b>					
Let's Talk Panelists	0	2	31	48	19
Rural	0	6	31	50	12
Urban	0	0	31	47	22

## PANELISTS' INSIGHTS ON IMMIGRATION

This section of this report summarizes key themes and insights from the eight Let's Talk dialogues with community members. Table 12 on the next page provides a general overview of the approaches and action items discussed in each dialogue and how the participants generally felt about the actions they discussed. In this table, the action items within each approach are ordered based on the general level of support for that action item, taking into consideration all of the dialogues. Table 13 shows the views of the participants in the two Spanish language dialogues. Summaries of each individual dialogue were compiled in *Let's Talk Supplemental Report—Immigration Deliberative Dialogue Summaries*.

### A NOTE ABOUT METHODS

In addition to demonstrating how deliberative dialogues can be used to foster civil discussion and communication among community residents, we can also use the content of the dialogues to identify community members' views. Much like a focus group, it is important to remember that deliberative dialogues are not intended to yield results or insights that are generalizable to a larger population (in this case, the population of Marathon County as a whole). Rather, they can help better understand the reasons underlying individuals' perspectives or the range of perspectives on a given topic, and to provide insights about how a situation is perceived and experienced. The information shared in this report *only* reflects the insights, feedback, and experiences of the individuals who participated in each dialogue.

Given the nature of the topics discussed and differences in individuals' experiences, there may be different voices and multiple views that need to be presented. Our goal is to accurately represent the range of views expressed by the participants. For each individual dialogue, multiple sets of notes were taken by a notetaker and at least one observer (in many cases there were two observers). All notes for a given dialogue were shared with a member of the WIPPS Research Partners team whose responsibility was to combine and synthesize the notes into a single summary.

With the exception of specifying when a comment was made by "one individual," this report does not specify the exact frequency or quantity with which comments or opinions are expressed. The use of specific numeric references in a qualitative report can sometimes lead readers to inadvertently think about responses in terms of percentages (X percent of participants think this; Y percent think that), which can then lead to false generalizations. Those kinds of specific characterizations are better suited for a methodology where a larger number of individuals are sampled.

Instead, we use terminology to convey the general pervasiveness of a theme such as "many" or "most"; "some" or "several"; or "a few." How these characterizations are applied is largely at the discretion of the analyst/observer when they were preparing their notes, as they can depend on the context of the question being analyzed; whether comments or themes related to a question come up at other points in the discussion; and other cues such as body language of the participants (e.g., head nodding). Because different individuals may have had different perceptions or definitions of what characterizations like "many" versus "some" mean, it is important to recognize that there is some inherent subjectivity in the use of these terms.

To minimize some of the inherent subjectivity and to introduce a level of inter-rater reliability, the individual summaries in this document and characterizations of comments were shared back with all of the moderators, notetakers, and observers assigned to a given dialogue. This additional review served as a "check" on the balance and completeness of the summary of the comments and to ensure agreement that the report accurately reflected the dialogues they observed.

For readability, convenience, and to improve the flow of the narrative, throughout the report we sometimes use terminology such as "Participants reported..." or "Participants noted..." These are all shorthand references to the individuals who participated in the dialogues and should not be interpreted as reflective of, or generalized to, all county residents. At the same time, these perspectives can yield powerful insights that are valuable to understanding a broad and diverse group of individuals' views on the topics discussed.

**Table 12. Dialogue Participants’ Views about Actions to Address Immigration**

Issue Approach and Action Items	Let’s Talk Deliberative Dialogues							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	7/10/2024	7/16/2024	7/19/2024	7/24/2024	8/5/2024	8/13/2024	8/19/2024	8/22/2024
<b>APPROACH 1: WELCOME IMMIGRANTS; BE A BEACON OF FREEDOM</b>								
Provide legal residency to DREAMers	Support	Support	Support	Support	Support	Mixed	Support	Support
Allow all residents to get a driver’s license regardless of status	Support	Support	Support	Support		Mixed	Support	
Provide a path to legal status	Support	Support	Support	Support	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed
Welcome immigrants eager to work in low-skilled or shortage jobs	Support	Support	Mixed	Support	Mixed	Mixed	Support	Mixed
Accept more refugees fleeing violence and deprivation	Support	Mixed	Support	Oppose	Oppose	Mixed	Support	Mixed
<b>APPROACH 2: ENFORCE LAWS; BE FAIR TO THOSE WHO FOLLOW THE RULES</b>								
Build a secure southern border wall	Oppose	Oppose	Support	Mixed		Support	Mixed	Mixed
Prosecute employers if they hire workers without legal papers	Oppose	Oppose		Mixed	Support	Mixed	Oppose	Oppose
Identify and deport those who entered illegally; require reapplication	Oppose	Oppose	Oppose	Mixed	Mixed	Mixed	Oppose	Oppose
Detain all adults that enter illegally, even if it means separating families	Oppose		Mixed	Oppose			Mixed	Oppose
Cut off federal funding to “sanctuary cities”	Oppose	Oppose		Oppose		Oppose	Oppose	Mixed
<b>APPROACH 3: SLOW DOWN IMMIGRATION; FOCUS ON COMMON BONDS</b>								
Reform policy to provide a clear and affordable path to citizenship	Support		Support	Support	Support	Mixed	Support	Support
Require English immersion programs in school	Oppose		Mixed	Support	Mixed	Support	Oppose	Mixed
Reduce the number of authorized immigrants admitted each year	Oppose	Mixed	Support	Oppose	Oppose	Mixed	Oppose	Oppose
Give preference to those who already speak English	Oppose		Oppose	Mixed		Oppose	Mixed	Oppose
Restrict reunification to spouses/children, and needed workers							Oppose	Mixed

If a cell is blank, the action item was not discussed by the group or was only raised by one person without affirmation for or against by other participants.

There were additional action items which had support during the discussion of Approach 1, including: adjust licensing procedures and standards so that highly-skilled people can continue to practice in this country and give DREAMers the chance to apply for financial support to go to college. An additional action item for Approach includes: address the reasons people are leaving their own countries. Additional action items for Approach 3 include: educate citizens and immigrants about each other’s values and journeys and require a Spanish immersion program. See Appendix B for a similar table for the Spanish language dialogues. We include insights from the Spanish language dialogues in our key findings below.

**Table 13. Spanish Language Dialogue Participants’ Views about Actions to Address Immigration**

Issue Approach and Action Items	Dialogues in Spanish	
	1 - Obey Center	2 - Wilson Room
	9/30/2024	9/30/2024
<b>APPROACH 1: WELCOME IMMIGRANTS; BE A BEACON OF FREEDOM</b>		
Provide legal residency to DREAMers	Support	Support
Allow all residents to get a driver’s license regardless of status	Support	Support
Provide a path to legal status	Support	Support
Welcome immigrants eager to work in low-skilled or shortage jobs	Mixed	Support
Accept more refugees fleeing violence and deprivation	Mixed	Mixed
<b>APPROACH 2: ENFORCE LAWS; BE FAIR TO THOSE WHO FOLLOW THE RULES</b>		
Prosecute employers if they hire workers without legal papers	Oppose	Mixed
Build a secure southern border wall	Oppose	Oppose
Identify and deport those who entered illegally; require reapplication	Oppose	Oppose
Detain all adults that enter illegally, even if it means separating families	Oppose	Oppose
Cut off federal funding to “sanctuary cities”		
<b>APPROACH 3: SLOW DOWN IMMIGRATION; FOCUS ON COMMON BONDS</b>		
Reform policy to provide a clear and affordable path to citizenship	Support	Support
Require English immersion programs in school	Mixed	Support
Give preference to those who already speak English	Mixed	Mixed
Restrict reunification to spouses/children, and needed workers	Mixed	Mixed
Reduce the number of authorized immigrants admitted each year	Oppose	Mixed

If a cell is blank, the action item was not discussed by the group or was only raised by one person without affirmation for or against by other participants.



## MANAGING IMMIGRATION: A COMPLEX PROBLEM REQUIRING MULTIFACETED SOLUTIONS

The dialogues conveyed a wide variety of opinions, solutions, and views of the topic of how to manage immigration in our country. Participants drew from their own experiences, values, and knowledge when discussing the issues.

➤ **Given the diverse political makeup of each group, one might expect that there would be considerable disagreement about the various approaches to managing immigration and that there would be a polarization of views about the various action items. However, in most of the dialogues, the moderators and observers noted that there was a great deal of common ground among the participants.**

- Participants were able to disagree with each other by explaining their ideas and without attacking dissenting views. For example, it was noted that participants in one group were quick to acknowledge the validity of the arguments that opposed their own opinions. In a separate group, they were able to find consensus, but also discuss points of contention respectfully.

➤ **Participants generally agreed that managing immigration requires a combination of action items drawing from multiple approaches and perspectives. The complex nature of the issue requires a multi-faceted approach. Themes of clarity, consistency, and fairness emerged and participants across groups frequently described an immigration system that, from their perspective, seems too complicated and is not always enforced fairly.**

- Notions of clarity were raised when discussing action items that could have different effects on population groups or could be enforced in different ways. For example, this was particularly relevant to discussing providing a legal path to citizenship.
- Additionally, many groups agreed that there are too many conflicting policies, some enforced and some not, that make the immigration system very difficult to navigate.
- Participants mentioned fairness throughout multiple discussions. For example, fairness was mentioned when discussing how DREAMers are punished for the actions of their parents and conversely, when arguing that accepting unauthorized immigrants is unfair to legal immigrants.
- The concept of consistency arose frequently when discussing the enforcement of laws. This usually went together with fairness, as participants who want laws to be enforced consistently argue that it is good for accountability and keeping things fair.

### APPROACH 1 – WELCOME IMMIGRANTS; BE A BEACON OF FREEDOM

This approach is based on a premise that immigration has helped make the U.S. what it is today—a dynamic and diverse culture, an engine of the global economy, and a beacon of freedom around the world. Consistent with this approach, we should develop an immigration policy that builds on that tradition, one that welcomes newcomers, helps immigrant families stay together, and protects those fleeing from war and oppression. Welcoming immigrants is not only the right thing to do; it benefits our economy and counters falling U.S. birth rates. To remain competitive in a fast-changing global marketplace, the United States needs newcomers who are willing to contribute their skills to strengthening our culture of ingenuity and entrepreneurship.

➤ **Of the approaches to managing immigration discussed in the Let's Talk dialogues, there was generally more overall support for the action items included in Approach 1 (*Welcome Immigrants; Be a Beacon of Freedom*) than for the other approaches.**

- Participants in many groups expressed how important immigrants are to the workforce and that immigrants will always continue to come to this country. The welcoming perspective reflected in this approach was more in line with participants' underlying preferences.
- The groups recognized that there are very complex, important issues facing immigrants and immigrant communities. While participants showed that this approach is more representative of their values, groups addressed the action items individually and applied their belief systems and perceptions of situations and circumstances when deliberating on specific action items. Participants recognized that there are different situations that require different solutions.

**DREAMers<sup>10</sup> do not have a guaranteed pathway to citizenship. They pay taxes as citizens do, however they are prevented from accessing the benefits of citizenship such as voting rights and receiving federal assistance benefits or federal financial aid to attend school, and they do not qualify for federal government positions or the military. The issue of DREAMers not having a path to citizenship was one that many participants felt should be addressed by policymakers, including through the use of a potentially streamlined process. Many of the groups found it to be unfair that children brought to the U.S. illegally should be punished for their parents' actions.**

- Of the action items discussed, there was consistently strong support across the groups for providing a pathway to citizenship specifically for DREAMers. Participants said that DREAMers did not choose to come to the U.S. and that for many, this is the only home they have ever known. To deport them to a country they have never been to, where they may not speak the language, and may not have any family supports, would be wrong.
- Some of the dialogues included participants who were DREAMers themselves and they shared their experiences within their groups. Many participants were not necessarily familiar with the status of DREAMers and did not understand the legality of the DREAMers' situations. After learning more, they were more in favor of supporting a pathway to citizenship for DREAMers. Multiple groups said that people are generally unaware of the reality of people in this situation.
- Fairness was mentioned when discussing how DREAMers are punished for the actions of their parents, but also noting that accepting unauthorized immigrants is unfair to legal immigrants.
- Participants in the Spanish language dialogues shared generally similar views on the issue of providing a pathway to citizenship for DREAMers. Their comments echoed concerns about not wanting to punish children for their parent's actions and the harm that deportation would do.

**While many of the groups reflected strong support for giving those who entered the U.S. without permission years ago a path to legal status, views of this action item's expanded view of a legal pathway were more mixed when compared to the prior action item referring specifically to DREAMers. Many participants noted that immigration has been part of the country's history and that legal pathways have been available. Other participants wanted to distinguish immigrants who entered legally from those who came illegally.**

- Those who were against a legal pathway for those who previously entered the U.S. without permission stated that illegal entry should not be normalized and that it would not be fair to those coming in legally and following proper channels. They were also concerned about the costs of helping unauthorized immigrants. Among those who do not support a path to legal status, some noted that the U.S. should focus on helping its own citizens.
- Those in support of having a legal pathway believed it should be set up in a way that makes the process efficient.
- The differences in views were stark: some participants felt that once a person has come here and has created a life, that they deserve to stay; others felt that illegal entry is wrong and should not be rewarded.
- A common question was that, if this kind of policy were to be enacted, how would a cutoff date be determined?
- Participants in the Spanish language dialogues supported providing a path to legal status for those who entered the U.S. without permission, noting that these are people who have built their lives here and have played an important role in filling jobs that Americans will not do. They deserve the opportunity to obtain citizenship. Some of the participants in the Spanish language dialogues noted that this should be accompanied by background checks so that people who maintain a clean record here have the chance to become citizens but those who have committed crimes should not be afforded the opportunity.

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<sup>10</sup> A DREAMer is a young immigrant who is a recipient of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), an executive branch program created by President Barack Obama in 2012. The term "DREAMer" comes from the DREAM Act, a bill that sought to provide legal status to young immigrants who were brought into the U.S. by their parents. For more information, see <https://www.bushcenter.org/topics/immigration/dreamers>

➤ **Groups were keenly aware of the fact that some industries rely on immigrant/migrant labor<sup>11</sup> and many groups acknowledged that unauthorized labor is a significant part of the Wisconsin agricultural workforce. However, welcoming immigrants specifically to work in low-skilled or shortage jobs had mixed response due in large part to questions about the extent to which the economy relies on immigrant workers, how many workers are needed, and how processes would be put in place to manage industry-based immigration strategies. Participant comments reflected a tension between an economic need for labor with a need to enforce immigration policies.**

- Many of the groups agreed that there is a need for laborers in low-skilled jobs and that American citizens are not necessarily filling these roles. Some groups argued that this means the U.S. should welcome those who are willing to work in those areas. Other groups did not reach that consensus because participants had reservations such as how quotas are enforced, feel it is unfair to welcome unauthorized workers while other immigrants struggle to come in legally, and question how to keep track of everyone who enters the county.
- There was a lack of consensus in the groups about whether more immigration is necessary to keep certain industries afloat and whether immigrants coming in have an easy or hard time obtaining a job and documentation, as well as whether they pay taxes.
- The participants in the Spanish language dialogues reiterated that immigrants are a substantial part of the workforce and, while there is support for welcoming people who are eager to work, one group pointed out that having immigrants come in specifically to fill roles that Americans do not want leaves them vulnerable to business owners who may take advantage of them. Many shared their own personal experiences working at dairy farms and are keenly aware that they and others do not have any other option than to work the kinds of jobs that Americans do not want to do.

➤ **Allowing residents to obtain a driver's license regardless of their immigration status received generally strong support across the dialogues in which this action item was discussed. In supporting this action item, participants wanted to ensure that everyone on the roads would have passed a state driver's test and therefore would increase safety for all.**

- Participants tended to agree with this action item because they agreed with the premise that having licenses available to everyone would lead to people taking the test, knowing the rules of the road, and would make roads safer for all. Some groups mentioned that it is a good system for making sure that everyone has a form of identification.
- Participants in one group had more mixed views of this action item. Those with hesitation felt it might give people rights to do anything. There was also concern that many unauthorized immigrants would not give their real identity to the government to avoid getting caught. Participants who were skeptical of the idea agreed that it would be good to have more people identified and to have only drivers who are knowledgeable on the roads, however they feel it was ironic to give a license to those not here legally.
- Participants in the Spanish language dialogues were also in support of allowing all residents to be eligible for a driver's license. The groups agreed that having everyone on the roads be knowledgeable and capable of driving would improve road safety for all. Participants also discussed the feasibility of obtaining a license, mentioning that rules are different depending on the state, and that sometimes even if a license is legally available, the paperwork can be so difficult that it is an obstacle to obtaining a license.

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<sup>11</sup> Migrant can refer to any person who moves from one place to another, especially in order to find work or better living conditions. Migrants can be "immigrants" if they intend to stay permanently in a country other than their place of birth or "non-immigrants" if they intend to stay temporarily. For readability, we will use the broader term "immigrant" here as a short-hand and note that it could also include migrant labor. According to a 2023 survey by the University of Wisconsin – Madison's School for Workers, "more than 10,000 undocumented immigrant workers perform an estimated 70% of the labor on Wisconsin dairy farms." See <https://schoolforworkers.wisc.edu/trapped-on-wisconsin-farms-the-hidden- plight-of-trafficked-workers/>

**Whether to accept more refugees<sup>12</sup> fleeing violence and deprivation in their home countries generated a broad spectrum of views, with most groups having views that were mixed or opposed.**

- In discussing this action item, some questioned the differences between refugees and immigrants. It is not necessarily clear from the notes whether participants' comments were always distinguishing between those voluntarily coming to the U.S. and those fleeing their home countries due to violence.
- In arguments in favor of accepting more refugees, supporters noted that many people in the U.S. today are descendants of those who came from similar situations as refugees.
- Those against accepting more refugees discussed the financial strain on U.S. systems and raised concerns about a lack of willingness to assimilate to U.S. culture. Examples cited were children requiring language services to healthcare costs. Some expressed concerns that services for refugees were prioritized over U.S. citizens. Others argued that it would be preferable to "fix situations in their home countries" instead. Discussions also touched on concerns about vetting those coming into the country.
- Views were mixed in the Spanish language dialogues. Some of the participants who were against accepting more refugees shared that they believe asylum seekers take advantage of the immigration system, and it is unfair to give refugees an easier path to citizenship and work than other immigrants.

**APPROACH 2 – ENFORCE THE LAW AND BE FAIR TO THOSE WHO FOLLOW THE RULES**

This approach says we need a fair system, in which the rules are clear and, above all, enforced. Ever since the nation's first immigration policies were put into place, the premise has been that welcoming newcomers should be done in an orderly way. But with an estimated 11 million people living in the country illegally, our current system is unjust and uncontrolled. In fairness to the many people who are waiting to come to the US and stay here legally, we have an obligation to enforce our borders and deport people who enter the country without our permission. That is why we must strengthen our commitment to border security, crack down on those who overstay their visas, and introduce more stringent measures to deal with immigrants living outside the law.

**Of the three broad approaches discussed during the Let's Talk immigration dialogues, there was generally more strong opposition to action items under the *Enforce the Law and Be Fair to Those Who Follow Rules* approach than to the other two approaches.**

- Many participants considered aspects of the action items under the "Enforce the Law" approach to be inhumane, with particular concerns about the consequences for children and some expressed concerns about whether the action items under this approach would have significant positive benefits.

**There was largely mixed support across the dialogues for securing the southern border by building a wall. Those who strongly opposed building a wall said it will not prevent people from crossing the border, while those in favor said that having an open border is bad for the country and illegal immigration is unfair to those coming legally.**

- Discussions about the southern border wall touched upon the cost to construct and maintain a wall and skepticism about its effectiveness. Participants in one group noted that, "as long as immigrants want to come here, they will find a way. The wall would not stop that."
- Those in favor of the wall do not necessarily agree that it is a single clear solution, but rather building a wall is consistent with a desire to have a stricter immigration policy and to help keep drugs and crime out of the country.
- Participants in the Spanish language dialogues were strongly opposed to idea of a border wall due to agreement that the wall does not work. Some participants mentioned that it is a waste of time and money and its only purpose will be to become an eventual tourist attraction.

<sup>12</sup> The term refugee refers to status granted to an individual, prior to departure for and arrival in the United States, who has been determined by competent authority to be fleeing persecution or have a well-founded fear of persecution in their own country because of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion.

➤ **The discussion of prosecuting employers who hire unauthorized workers created a wide range of responses among participants, with most groups opposing this action item or offering mixed support. Participants recognized that large employers would be impacted differently than small employers.**

- The groups weighed many aspects of the advantages and disadvantages of holding larger employers accountable for hiring unauthorized workers, including: how workers are affected, how businesses operate, and the effect on industries that rely on unauthorized labor. Overall, there was more opposition to this item than support.
- Participants brought their own personal experiences to this discussion, some from the role of a small employer and others as workers or friends and family of workers who they feel are exploited due to employers taking advantage of their unauthorized status.
- Multiple groups referenced small dairy farms as an example of employers who will be doubly hurt by this item, as they do not have the resources to validate all their workers and are already struggling to find employees.
- Participants in the Spanish language dialogues expressed concern about the effects this policy would have on small businesses that rely on workers and the harm that would come to the workers they employ. One group noted that bad business owners who take advantage of unauthorized immigrants should be prosecuted, and participants shared their own experiences of being laborers who work for businesses that mistreat them.

➤ **There was mostly opposition to the action item of identifying and deporting those who had entered the U.S. illegally and requiring that they reapply for entry into the country; several groups expressed mixed views of this action item. Across the groups, the discussions of this action item illustrated the complexities and competing priorities of managing U.S. immigration policy. On the one hand, while many groups expressed concerns about how the policy would be implemented, its costs, and potential economic consequences, participants also recognized the need to ensure secure borders and to uphold existing immigration laws and fair processes.**

- Many groups expressed concerns about the implementation of a policy that would identify and deport those who had entered the U.S. illegally, including concern over what the process of finding people and deporting them would look like; what would happen to the families of those who are deported; whether the U.S. has the capacity to implement this policy and how much it would cost; and what it would do to the economy, especially in industries like farming and agriculture.
- A participant in one group stated that the idea of “rounding up and deporting” is morally reprehensible; another noted the potential for racial profiling.
- Participants in favor of the item made arguments that align with the need for more stringent border policies. For example, in one group, there was mixed agreement on if existing laws are being upheld at all, with one noting that “people are just walking across the border without being stopped.”
- Participants in the Spanish language dialogues were strongly opposed to deporting residents who entered the country illegally, citing concerns that doing so would separate families, cause widespread anxiety for those who could be affected, and hurt the economy.

➤ **There was mostly opposition to the action item of detaining adults who enter the U.S. illegally and possibly separating families. Participants had considerable worry about the effects of separating children from their parents and asked what will happen to those who are detained, and how such policies would even help.**

- Some participants shared their own personal experiences of racial profiling and worried about the consequences of attempting this policy if it were to be enacted poorly. Participants in one group raised concerns about whether this policy would promote “bounties”, implying it could create incentives to find those in the country illegally.
- Participants expressed considerable concern about the consequences of family separation on children, as well as the possibly poor and unsanitary conditions at detention facilities. Some questioned the costs of this action item.
- Participants in the Spanish language dialogues expressed strong opposition to detaining adults who entered illegally and were particularly concerned about the notion of forced family separation. Participants shared their own personal experiences and the stress that this idea causes for them. They are already worried about their own legal status and this kind of policy could cause them to be separated from their children. The groups felt that this action is an abuse of power and that the government is not concerned about the well-being of people.

➤ **There was generally strong opposition to the idea of withholding federal funds from sanctuary cities<sup>13</sup>, due largely to concerns that such a policy would have a disproportionately negative impact on communities-at-large.**

- There was a strong consensus that policies that cut-off federal funding to sanctuary cities will cause real harm for many citizens and would fail to create any positive outcomes, with particular concern that it would do severe harm to cities already struggling the most. In other words, participants noted that the drawbacks outweigh any potential positives from this action item and the negatives will affect the entire community.
- Some participants wondered how cities could provide services such schools and law enforcement if funding is cut-off. Others noted that it would unfairly “punish” all residents of a particular community.
- Multiple groups questioned the feasibility, morality, and legality of this action item, with some noting that such policies would likely become tied up in costly court battles. Neither of the Spanish language groups discussed this action item.

### APPROACH 3 – SLOW DOWN IMMIGRATION AND FOCUS ON COMMON BONDS

This option recognizes that newcomers have strengthened our culture in the past. But the number of foreign-born residents has reached 48.2 million, or 14.1 percent of the population. Fifty years ago, the foreign-born share of our population was 4.7 percent. We need to moderate the flow of immigrants and focus more on helping newcomers integrate into U.S. society. We should have a measured immigration policy—one that reduces the rate of immigration and ensures that immigrants become part of the US community. We need to find ways to accommodate newcomers without compromising our sense of national unity.

➤ **There was considerable support across all groups for reforming policies to allow for a clearer and more affordable path to citizenship. Of all of the various action items discussed across all three approaches, the idea of making the citizenship process more clear and understandable was among the action items with the strongest and most consistent support.**

- Participants noted that there are too many conflicting federal policies and awareness of the policies is limited. The process needs to be simplified and more easily-understandable. Several pointed to the need for costly immigration lawyers to help navigate the rules and regulations.
- Others noted the need to enforce current policies, with one participant stating, “let’s enforce the laws that are in place and evaluate after...six months.” Another participant said that, “if we want people to be law-abiding, then it should be easier for them to be able to abide by the law.” The implication was that the complexity of the process and policies may make it difficult to follow legally.
- The Spanish language groups expressed strong support for reforming immigration policy to provide a clear, affordable, and more concise path to citizenship.

➤ **There was largely mixed support for requiring English immersion programs in school. While some participants noted the value of learning English in terms of being able to more-easily navigate U.S. society and in school, others expressed concerns about the costs of implementing such programs. Concerns were also expressed about whether such programs would be considered “indoctrination” and reminiscent of detainment camps in Canada that stripped First Natives people of their cultures and languages.**

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<sup>13</sup> According to a report issued by the University of Pennsylvania’s Perry World House , there is no consensus or legal definition of the term “sanctuary city.” Generally, sanctuary cities (as well as other sanctuary jurisdictions, such as counties and states) direct their local law enforcement agencies to refrain from actively assisting ICE and other federal agencies with enforcing federal civil immigration law. Many of these localities prefer to refer to themselves as “welcoming cities” —that is, cities that have policies to welcome all individuals and promote the inclusion of residents in local civil society regardless of their immigration status. See <https://global.upenn.edu/perryworldhouse/news/sanctuary-cities-explained>

- Some of the support expressed for this action item was based around the notion of, “It’s America and you need to learn English.” Others noted the importance of being able to communicate, with one participant stating that, “When their English improved, they had an easier time in the United States.”
- In one group, some participants noted that this action item, “feels [like] this is indoctrination.” For them, language fluency is not relevant to their validity as a person, and that people can “learn America’s values” without learning English. For others, this item had a negative connotation similar to re-education or immersion camps.
- A separate group discussed the importance of immigrants maintaining their own culture, but noted that it should not be “too big of an ask...for some[one] to abide by our culture.” There was agreement that even if immigrants “don’t abide by culture, they do need to abide by laws.”
- Others expressed concerns about the costs of requiring English language immersion programs, but others wondered if these kinds of programs were already being done in schools through “English as a Second Language” (ESL) programs.
- Participants in the Spanish language dialogues were mostly in favor of English immersion programs in schools. They agreed that kids should have the opportunity to learn the language and that programs should be offered for interested adults, as well. Participants added that adult programs should be free and accessible for people with different levels of familiarity with the language.

**A majority of the groups were opposed to limiting or reducing the number of authorized immigrants admitted each year, with some expressing concerns about how such limits would be determined and what the criteria would be for who would be allowed into the country. Others noted a preference for increasing legal immigration, including providing visas to help address workforce shortages. Participants spoke of the benefits of having authorized immigrants come to this country, such as the wealth of new cultures, technological innovations, and economic benefits.**

- Rather than reducing or limiting authorized immigration, participants reiterated concerns about the need to reduce the numbers of unauthorized people instead.
- Participants from several groups added that they are concerned with visitors who stay beyond their visas and added that there are areas being harmed by high levels of immigration. They spoke about ways to help the areas that are burdened by immigration such as by reducing immigration from overwhelmed areas.
- Participants in the Spanish language dialogues were not inherently supportive of reducing the number of authorized immigrants that can come to the country, however many mentioned concerns they have with the current system. There is concern about the equality of how visas are distributed and that those who are awarded temporary visas are overstaying. One group noted that people will always find a way to come here and that reducing the number of authorized entries will simply increase the number of unauthorized entries, and not decrease the amount of people coming in.

**When asked to share their thoughts about giving preference to immigrants who speak English, groups were largely opposed. Whether someone knows English when they come here, learns while here, or does not learn it at all, that this does not define their value as a person.**

- When speaking about this issue, participants raised the idea that there should be more English classes available. This was mentioned without implying that everyone should be forced to learn English, but to make a point that everyone should have the opportunity to learn. Some participants disagreed and felt that speaking English is important for being able to communicate with others and understand road signs. When these points were raised, others would respond that many other countries are able to be accommodating and that it is un-American to discriminate due to language capabilities.
- Views in the Spanish language dialogues were mixed. Discussions revolved around American values of acceptance, the limited opportunities available for those who arrive without knowing the language, and the importance of having an ability to communicate with each other.

- Participants noted their own experiences using translator apps to communicate, efforts to learn the language, and how not being able to speak English has affected their experiences.

**➤ Restricting reunification of workers’ families to only their spouses and children was not discussed by the majority of groups. Of the two groups that did discuss the item, one was against the proposal and the other group had participants on both sides of the issue.**

- The group against restricting reunification noted that immigrants’ families are often support systems for them and that it would be wrong to prevent families from reuniting.
- The group that was more in favor of restriction said that extended families should be able to come over only for a limited time.
- Restricting reunification to spouses and children was an action item that participants in the Spanish language dialogues did not necessarily support, but also did not have an alternate solution for. Both groups had participants with views on opposing sides of the issue and while against family separation, they were also not in favor of allowing permanent residency for families. Participants noted the importance of having family as a support system and one group favored issuing temporary work permits and sending workers back to their own countries once their time is up.



## APPENDIX A: OPEN-ENDED SURVEY RESPONSES

➤ **Do you think it was valuable to engage in this dialogue with other members of your community? Please explain.**<sup>14</sup>

- A little. Don't think anyone changed their liberal views.
- Absolutely a great experience. I appreciate moderation of tough discussions around the complex issues related to immigration.
- ABSOLUTELY! I learned so much today and felt really privileged to be a part of this group today.
- All way good / view differ
- Have met some wonderful residents of Marathon County - there is room for collaboration.
- I definitely think it is valuable because it pushes people to get out of their bubble of confirmation bias that comes from curated algorithms on social media as well as reinforcing ideas amongst family & friends. I also like the way the different stances were illustrated and there were talking points in each one. That made it easy to follow along.
- I enjoy the perspective of people with different views and experience
- I feel that even with differing opinions, we were all able to put in some input and it was well received by other members
- I really appreciated having a group member who has been through the process of becoming a citizen. Her information was so eye opening.
- It is an important issue that should not be ignored however I believe only the upcoming election will bring a difference.
- It is very valuable as others brought up great speaking points that I wouldn't have thought of.
- It was fabulous. We were a smaller group so we could all really be a part of the discussion. I appreciated the perspective the other members brought.
- It's important to understand good supported points of view.
- Na
- Practice in listening and interacting with folks of differing viewpoints.
- Respectful conversation is productive
- Talking about important issues with people you don't know is invaluable.
- This is the best discussion of the 3. I think it was because of the way it was introduced. Thank you!
- Turns out, the group was very much in agreement on the issues
- Yes (x2)
- Yes - Always good to share ideas
- Yes - it is always beneficial to broaden my own view - I could be missing something!
- Yes - very intelligent
- Yes , hear other viewpoints.
- Yes, it helped
- Yes, the more common ground we can find the better.
- Yes! Enormously so. The conversation was especially spirited and there were many positives that yielded "common ground"
- Yes! I find it educational.
- Yes, a healthy dialogue tonight.
- Yes, because I learned new things.
- Yes, different ideas and viewpoints were brought forward from different experiences. I was surprised by their understanding.
- Yes, enjoyed everyone's views on all of the topics.

<sup>14</sup> The open-ended responses in this appendix were not edited.

- Yes, I appreciate the diversity of age and background.
- Yes, I like hearing other perspectives and personal stories.
- Yes, I think it helps everyone get their options out, whether the same or different
- Yes, it helped me gain a new understanding of different aspects of the issue
- Yes, it's always good to see things from a different perspective. It can open new opportunities and thoughts you hadn't considered before.
- Yes, it's always valuable to engage with others.
- Yes, learned important things.
- Yes, very valuable.
- Yes. Even though some of the viewpoints were extreme I at least feel I am more aware of those differing positions
- Yes. Lots of agreement.
- Yes. The more we talk about an issue the better we can do to work toward a viable solution. We need to engage a larger number of people to talk and develop an action plan.
- Yes. To find solutions!
- Yes. Very helpful to hear divergent opinions.
- Yes. I learned things I was not aware of
- Yes; different perspectives are good to have.



**Is there anything else you would like to share with us about today's session? Please explain.**

- Conflict with DNC opening session, but still glad I could join tonight.
- Excellent discussion
- Excellent!
- Fantastic moderators
- Great dialogue today. Very much enjoyed the event.
- Great discussion about an American issue. Knowing that in my opinion that politics is the main problem causes stagnant policies.
- Great job for all the facilitation!
- Great meeting
- Having consistent members in each cohort could have value.
- I do not think it helpful for people (moderator) to read the paper that the participant should have read before coming and been familiar with.
- I find these dialogues very interesting and eye opening on subjects that I wouldn't normally think of.
- I love we have all ages and backgrounds!
- I really enjoy this and hearing all the viewpoints. I have never been in a session where only a "few" dominated - very difficult to get viewpoints of a couple that had very different views than mine.
- I think it's very important to get diverse groups as much as possible in age, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.
- I thought we might brainstorm on some possibilities to help the situation more Otherwise we can just take surveys on what we agree or disagree. Maybe I was trying to problem solve and that wasn't what you were looking for- not sure
- Inform yourself before attending.
- It was great overall, great discussion had by all.
- It was quite informative.
- Learned from other participants Things I never knew before. But maybe did and didn't pay attention.
- Let's fix this
- Lively!

- Na
- No (x 2)
- Nope! Thanks.
- Please let me back for another one I enjoyed this so much today and really value the experience I've gotten.
- Thank you for leading this group. I so enjoy this type of organized discussion forum, particularly on issues that have the potential to be quite loaded.
- Thank you for undertaking this important work and facilitating these conversations.
- Despite differences, it was an excellent experience...and there was "common ground."
- Thank you.
- The facilitators did a fantastic job. Very positive and able to suss out commonalities and (this was not completed)
- This left me so energized and hopeful. Thank you so very much for allowing me to be a part of the discussion.
- Unfortunately, it is too political charged and I wish these discussions would have some impact on overall thought processes on common sense.
- Very positive group
- We need more. Can you share the list?
- Well administered
- You did a good job of keeping the group on track when we got derailed!

## APPENDIX B: SPANISH LANGUAGE DIALOGUES

Two dialogues on the topic of immigration were held in Spanish. Twenty-two (22) community members were recruited to serve as members of a Spanish language Let’s Talk panel. These Spanish language panelists all identified as Hispanic and about two-thirds were male (67%). The majority (82%) were living in a rural area. About one-third (36%) of the Spanish language panelists reported “some high school” as their level of education. An additional 36% reported obtaining their “GED.” Half (50%) of the Spanish language panelists were between the ages of 20 and 29; 36% were between the ages of 30 and 39. Twenty-one (21) of the 22 panelists registered for a Spanish language dialogue; of these, 17 participated. Summaries of the Spanish language dialogues are included in the *Let’s Talk Supplemental Report–Immigration Deliberative Dialogue Summaries*. Of the participants, 16 completed the post-dialogue survey. Given the relatively small number of survey responses (n=16), we do not make direct comparisons between the mini-panel and the main Let’s Talk panel. However, the patterns of responses are fairly consistent. The Spanish language dialogue moderators expressed some literacy concerns to the Let’s Talk team related to the survey questions. In future dialogues, the moderators will also read the questions out loud.

### CONSIDER TRADEOFFS AND SOLUTIONS

Table 14. Understanding Issues and Considering Tradeoffs

How much did today’s dialogue...	Not at all ↓	A little ↓	Some ↓	Quite a bit ↓	A great deal ↓
<b>...help you better understand the issue that you discussed? (%)</b>					
Spanish Language Dialogues	12	12	31	25	19
<b>...help you evaluate the pros and cons of various potential solutions to the issue that you discussed? (%)</b>					
Spanish Language Dialogues	6	12	25	44	12

Table 15. Levels of Disagreement and Common Ground

Thinking overall about today’s dialogue...	None ↓	A little ↓	Some ↓	Quite a bit ↓	A great deal ↓
<b>...how much disagreement was there among the participants? (%)</b>					
Spanish Language Dialogues	20	60	13	0	7
<b>...how much common ground was there among the participants? (%)</b>					
Spanish Language Dialogues	0	19	6	62	12

### EXPAND VIEWS ON AN ISSUE

Table 16. Considering New Perspectives

Thinking overall about today’s dialogue...	Not at all ↓	A little ↓	Some ↓	Quite a bit ↓	A great deal ↓
<b>...how much did you personally consider perspectives or viewpoints that you hadn’t considered before? (%)</b>					
Spanish Language Dialogues	0	19	6	62	12
<b>...how much do you think the other participants considered perspectives or viewpoints that they hadn’t considered before? (%)</b>					
Spanish Language Dialogues	0	31	31	25	12
<b>...how much did you value the input provided by the other participants? (%)</b>					
Spanish Language Dialogues	0	19	6	56	19
<b>...how much do you think the other participants valued the input you provided? (%)</b>					
Spanish Language Dialogues	0	13	20	40	27

**Table 17. Understanding Issues and Considering Tradeoffs**

During today's dialogue...	Very disrespectfully ↓	Somewhat disrespectfully ↓	Neutral ↓	Somewhat respectfully ↓	Very respectfully ↓
<b>...how did participants with differing views act toward one another? (%)</b>					
Spanish Language Dialogues	0	0	6	31	62
<b>...how did participants with similar views act toward one another? (%)</b>					
Spanish Language Dialogues	0	0	12	25	62

## APPRECIATE DIVERSE VIEWPOINTS AND DECREASE “DEMONIZATION” OF THOSE WITH DIFFERING VIEWS

**Table 18. Trust, Comfort, and Connectivity as a Result of Participation**

Coming out of today's dialogue...	Much less than before ↓	Somewhat less than before ↓	No change ↓	Somewhat more than before ↓	Much more than before ↓
<b>...how much do you value viewpoints on the issue that differ from yours? (%)</b>					
Spanish Language Dialogues	0	6	12	50	31
<b>...how comfortable do you feel interacting with members of your community who hold viewpoints on the issue that differ from yours? (%)</b>					
Spanish Language Dialogues	0	0	6	38	56
<b>...how trusting do you feel toward members of your community who hold viewpoints on the issue that differ from yours? (%)</b>					
Spanish Language Dialogues	0	0	6	62	31
<b>...how connected do you feel to members of your community who hold viewpoints on the issue that differ from yours? (%)</b>					
Spanish Language Dialogues	0	0	12	62	25
<b>...how confident are you that your community can engage in civil conversations about the issue you discussed? (%)</b>					
Spanish Language Dialogues	0	0	12	38	50

## INCREASE ENGAGEMENT IN COMMUNITY ISSUES AND INTEREST IN MAKING A DIFFERENCE

**Table 19. Interest and Engagement in Community Issues**

Did participating in today's dialogue make you want to...	Not at all ↓	A little ↓	Some ↓	Quite a bit ↓	A great deal ↓
<b>...learn more about the issue you discussed? (%)</b>					
Spanish Language Dialogues	0	12	38	25	25
<b>...talk more with your fellow community members about the issue you discussed? (%)</b>					
Spanish Language Dialogues	0	7	40	20	33
<b>...collaborate with your fellow community members to address the issue you discussed? (%)</b>					
Spanish Language Dialogues	0	0	44	25	31
<b>...be more involved with decision-making in your community about the issue you discussed? (%)</b>					
Spanish Language Dialogues	6	0	38	31	25

## CONSIDER TRADEOFFS AND SOLUTIONS

**Do you think it was valuable to engage in this dialogue with other members of your community? Please explain.<sup>15</sup>**

- It help understand the issues that can help us
- The different points of view
- Well, yes. Because we all discussed and gave our opinions on the subject
- Yes
- Yes, a lot
- Yes, and hearing other points of view
- Yes, because I know they like agree with my opinions
- Yes, because there were a lot of subjects I didn't know about and it helps me to learn more about the topic
- Yes, I enjoyed talking about these action items
- Yes, I learned more about this topic
- Yes, I liked it. We had a chat and learned about this topic
- Yes, I liked talking about this subject
- Yes, since I understood and listened to points of view from other people in my situation
- Yes, there is a lot of things to learn in life
- Yes, to learn different points of view or if they agree with your opinions
- Yes, to meet more people

**Is there anything else you would like to share with us about today's session? Please explain.**

- I enjoyed the dynamic of making everyone participate to know their opinions
- I would like to know more about this topic
- Keep learning more
- No, it was good the whole time
- No. Thank you
- That the session goes more in depth
- We should know our rights as immigrants
- Yes, to keep learning about the topic

<sup>15</sup> The open-ended responses in this appendix were translated from Spanish.

## APPENDIX C: ISSUE GUIDE

### ISSUE GUIDE

# How should we manage immigration in our country?



## Let's Talk, Marathon County

**T**hroughout its history, the United States has been shaped by waves of immigrants who have brought their diverse backgrounds and traditions, contributing to the country's rich cultural heritage and economic growth.

In Marathon county, the recent arrival of refugees from countries such as Afghanistan, Syria and Congo, as well as unauthorized arrivals from the southern border, provide a local perspective on the national discussion over U.S. immigration policy.

This issue guide provides a framework for considering the kind of immigration policies we ought to have as a nation, how these policies affect our communities, and the values and goals we want to guide our decisions about immigration. Different groups of people may be affected by the changes in our approach to immigration, including:

- U.S. citizens, including people born in the United States and those who have become citizens through naturalization;
- Newcomers who came to the country legally through our current system;
- Refugees escaping war or oppression;
- People now living in the United States who entered the country without documentation, including many who arrived decades ago;
- People who arrived here with valid visas but have overstayed; and
- People brought here as infants or children by parents who came into the country without permission.

In 2023, the U. S. reached a seven-year high in number of refugee arrivals, at just over 60,000, driven by global conflicts and humanitarian crises. More than 969,000 immigrants became U.S. citizens in 2022, the largest naturalization total since 2008. 140,000 immigrant visas are available each year for those seeking to immigrate based on job skills. In addition, 10.4 million students, business travelers, and tourists were granted visas for temporary visits in 2023.

But these numbers don't tell the whole story. Some immigrants cross the border undetected or choose to stay on expired temporary visas. An estimated 11 million unauthorized immigrants are now living in the United States. The current situation on our southern border began with the arrival of unprecedented numbers of families and children from Central and South America, many of them asking for asylum and overwhelming border facilities. Compounding the issue, border officials have separated thousands of children from their families.

Most Americans agree that the nation's immigration policy needs an overhaul, but perceptions differ about what kind of solution the country needs.

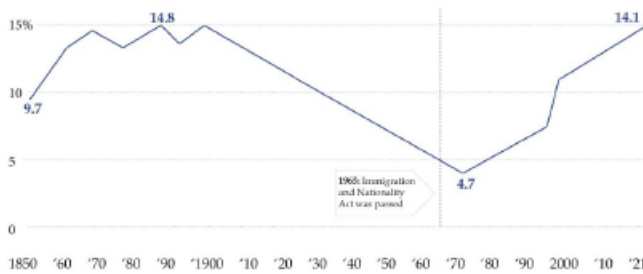
### How should the United States approach the issue of immigration?

This issue advisory presents three approaches to addressing immigration, each coming from a different perspective and each reflecting a different set of ideas about what should be done. Most people will find something to agree with in all three approaches, but each also has trade-offs, risks, or drawbacks to be taken into account and worked through. The options presented here are not ready-made solutions, but rather a starting point for weighing alternatives and reaching a sound judgment.

ISSUE GUIDE

### Immigrant share of U.S. population nears historic high in 2021

Percentage of U.S. population that is foreign born



Note: All numbers are rounded independently and are not adjusted to sum to US total or other totals.

Source: PUS Census Bureau, "Historic Census Statistics on Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850-2021" and Pew Research Center tabulations of 2010-2021 American Community Survey (IPUMS).

### 2023 ended with more migrant encounters at U.S.-Mexico border than any previous month on record

Monthly migrant encounters by U.S. Border Patrol at U.S.-Mexico border

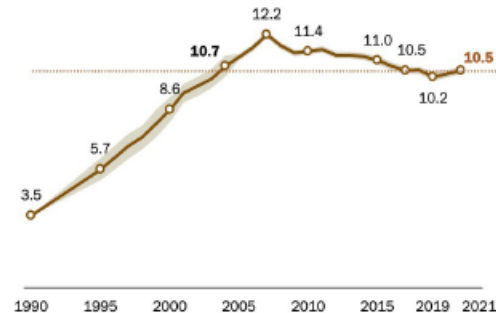


Note: Beginning in March 2020, monthly totals combine apprehensions and expulsions into a new category known as encounters. Monthly totals before March 2020 include all apprehensions only. Some migrants are encountered more than once.

Source: US Customs and Border Protection. Pew Research Center.

### Unauthorized immigration remained mostly stable from 2017-2021

Unauthorized immigrant population, in millions

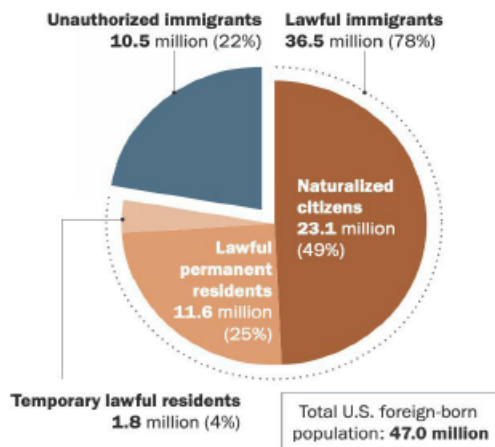


Note: Shading shows range of estimated 90% confidence interval.

Source: Pew Research Center estimates based on augmented US Census Bureau data

### Status of immigrants in the U.S.

Foreign-born population estimates, 2021



Note: All numbers are rounded independently and are not adjusted to sum to US total or other totals.

Source: Pew Research Center estimates for 2021 based on augmented US Census Bureau data (IPUMS).



## Option One: Welcome Immigrants; Be a Beacon of Freedom

This option says that immigration has helped make the US what it is today—a dynamic and diverse culture, an engine of the global economy, and a beacon of freedom around the world. We should develop an immigration policy that builds on that tradition, one that welcomes newcomers, helps immigrant families stay together, and protects those fleeing from war and oppression. Welcoming immigrants is not only the right thing to do; it benefits our economy and counters falling US birth rates. To remain competitive in a fast-changing global marketplace, the United States needs newcomers who are willing to contribute their skills to strengthening our culture of ingenuity and entrepreneurship.

### A Primary Drawback

This option would add even more burden to systems already overwhelmed by historically high levels of immigration.

Actions	Drawbacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Give those who entered the US without permission years ago a path to legal status. It's time to forgive and welcome these people who have become part of our communities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This allows immigrants who violated our laws to cut in front of the line of the thousands of people who are seeking to enter the United States legally.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Welcome immigrants who are willing to work, whether in low-skilled jobs many Americans do not want or in high-skilled jobs where there are shortages.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This would detract from the focus on helping our own citizens get jobs.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accept more refugees fleeing violence and deprivation in countries such as Syria, Ukraine, Afghanistan, El Salvador, and Guatemala. We have a moral obligation to help.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There are US citizens in need, too, and it is difficult to vet people coming from such areas of upheaval.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide legal residency and the ability to apply for citizenship to DREAMers, the term commonly used for undocumented immigrants who were brought to the United States as young children.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It's not fair to allow this group to benefit from the illegal actions of their families.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allow all residents to get driver's licenses, regardless of their immigration status and as long as they meet all licensing requirements, to make roads safer for all.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This could make it easier for criminals and terrorists to get fake documents.</li> </ul>

- Other options to consider....

As of 2021, 3.9% of Marathon County residents (5.32k people) were born outside of the U.S., which is lower than the national average of 13.6%.

*U.S. Census Bureau*

## Option Two: Enforce the Law; Be Fair to Those Who Follow the Rules

This option says we need a fair system, in which the rules are clear and, above all, enforced. Ever since the nation’s first immigration policies were put into place, the premise has been that welcoming newcomers should be done in an orderly way. But with an estimated 11 million people living in the country illegally, our current system is unjust and uncontrolled. In fairness to the many people who are waiting to come to the US and stay here legally, we have an obligation to enforce our borders and deport people who enter the country without our permission. That is why we must strengthen our commitment to border security, crack down on those who overstay their visas, and introduce more stringent measures to deal with immigrants living outside the law.

### A Primary Drawback

This will harm millions of people now living in our communities and contributing to our society. It will spread fear in cities and towns nationwide.

Actions	Drawbacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify people who entered the country illegally and deport them. Require that they reapply for entry.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This will tear up families—many of which include one or more US-born children. The punishment is not only impractical but far outweighs the crime.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cut off federal funding to “sanctuary cities” that refuse to cooperate with federal immigration agents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This punishes entire communities over disputes that should be settled legislatively. It could mean underfunded police departments and schools in some places and deny aid at a time of dire need.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prosecute employers if they hire workers without legal papers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This will create chaos in industries such as construction and agriculture, including dairy farming, and lead to higher prices for basic goods such as food and housing when times are already tough.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build a secure southern border wall.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This will cost billions of tax dollars. Plus, migrants already go around, climb over or cut through the existing walls.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Detain all adults who enter the country illegally, even if this means separating families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Such a “zero tolerance” policy traumatizes children who had no say in their parents’ decisions and invites international condemnation.</li> </ul>

- Other options to consider...

In 2022, some 708,000 foreign visitors to the United States, whose visas required them to depart by the end of the year, did not leave.

—US Department of Homeland Security

## Option Three: Slow Down Immigration and Focus on Common Bonds

This option recognizes that newcomers have strengthened our culture in the past. But the number of foreign-born residents has reached 48.2 million, or 14.1 percent of the population. Fifty years ago, the foreign-born share of our population was 4.7 percent. We need to moderate the flow of immigrants and focus more on helping newcomers integrate into US society. We should have a measured immigration policy—one that reduces the rate of immigration and ensures that immigrants become part of the US community. We need to find ways to accommodate newcomers without compromising our sense of national unity.

### A Primary Drawback

This option would rob us of much of the energy and hard work people from around the world bring to the United States. The coronavirus pandemic only underscored how many of our “essential workers”—serving in hospitals, staffing grocery stores, and producing food—are immigrants.

Actions	Drawbacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce the number of authorized immigrants admitted to the United States each year.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This deprives us of the workers needed in key industries such as agriculture and construction and could threaten the economy by lowering birthrates.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Give preference to immigrants who already speak English.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This would place an undue burden on some immigrants—especially those who are willing to take on some of the back-breaking jobs most US citizens do not want.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restrict family reunification to spouses and young children, and concentrate on admitting immigrants who will work in areas where we need them.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This would split immigrant families apart, forcing people who come here to leave loved ones behind, sometimes in danger or poverty.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schools should require English immersion programs so newcomers learn the language as quickly as possible and absorb US culture and democratic values.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Special language programs take needed time and funds away from other important subjects. Besides, teaching classes in both languages would better prepare students to participate in today's global economy.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reform the country's immigration policy so that the path to citizenship is clear, affordable and more concise than the current policy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This would require a significant and expensive investment in personnel - judges, lawyers, and other officials - to expedite the process.</li> </ul>

- Other actions to consider...

**Together, immigrants and their US-born children make up about 28 percent of US inhabitants.**

—Pew Research Center

## About This Issue Guide

THE IMMIGRATION ISSUE AFFECTS VIRTUALLY EVERY AMERICAN, directly or indirectly, often in deeply personal ways. This guide is designed to help people deliberate together about how we should approach the issue. The three options presented here reflect different ways of understanding what is at stake and shed light on the critical tensions in what we hold most valuable.

The issue forces us to consider a number of difficult questions, and there are no easy answers. Should we strictly enforce the law and deport people who are here without permission, or would deporting millions of people outweigh their crime? Should we welcome more newcomers to build a more vibrant and diverse society, or does this pose too great a threat to national unity? Should we accept more of the growing numbers of refugees from war-torn regions, or should we avoid the risk of allowing in people whose backgrounds may not have been fully checked? Should our priority be to help immigrants assimilate into our distinctive way of life—by insisting they learn English, for example—or should we instead celebrate a growing mosaic of different peoples?

### Ground Rules

- Focus on the options and actions we can take nationally and in our communities.
- Consider all options fairly.
- Listening is just as important as speaking.
- Let others finish their thoughts before sharing yours.
- No one or two individuals should dominate.
- Maintain an open and respectful atmosphere.
- Everyone is encouraged to participate.

## Holding a Deliberative Forum

### 1. Introduction

Review the ground rules.  
Introduce the issue.

### 2. Connect to Issue

What concerns you about the issue or how does it affect you or people you know?

### 3. Consider Each Option

What concerns Consider each option one at a time. Allow equal time for each.

- What is attractive?
- What about the potential drawbacks?

### 4. Review and Reflect

Review the conversation as a group.

- What areas of common ground were apparent?
- What tensions and trade-offs were most difficult?
- Who else do we need to hear from?

This issue guide was originally created by the National Issues Forums (NIF) in collaboration with the Kettering Foundation (ISBN: 978-1-946206-54-1). National Issues Forums issue guides are used by civic and educational organizations interested in addressing public issues. The original issue guide on immigration has been modified by the Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service (WIPPS). It is common for local communities and organizations to adapt NIF issue guides to local conditions. If you desire to access the original NIF issue guide on immigration, please visit [www.nifi.org](http://www.nifi.org).



## APPENDIX D: GLOSSARY

As with most sensitive topics, the language used to discuss immigration can be highly charged. People use different terms for the same concept and even official agencies do not always agree on what is encompassed by a particular definition. We offer this list, which is relatively short, as a starting point for this dialogue and we include here many of the terms used in the issue guide. At the start of each dialogue, the moderator informed the participants that they themselves would be using the term “unauthorized” when referring to individuals in the country illegally or without documentation. This term was selected to be more neutral and less partisan. However, participants were not instructed as to which term they should use, nor were they prevented from or asked to refrain from using alternate terminology.

### **Asylum Seeker/Asylee**

An individual who comes to the United States seeking protection due to persecution or fear of persecution in their home country on account of: race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or politic. An asylee is physically in the United States when they apply for asylee status.

### **U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)**

A branch of federal law enforcement within the Department of Homeland Security that oversees and protects the borders and ports of entry for the United States.

### **Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and DREAMers**

DACA is a program created to allow people who arrived in the United States illegally as children to apply for an administrative deferment of their deportation, as well as a work permit. “DREAMers” is a general term referring not just to those who were eligible to apply for the DACA program, but any unauthorized immigrant in the United States who arrived as a child and has grown up here.

### **Encounter**

These fall into two categories: An apprehension, which is when someone is temporarily detained for crossing the border illegally between ports of entry. They may or may not be arrested; and an inadmissible, which is when someone seeking legal admission at an official port of entry is found ineligible for entry to the U.S.

### **Green Card**

A document also known as a permanent resident card. It allows a foreign-born person to live and work permanently in the U.S.

### **Illegal/Unauthorized/Undocumented**

Used to describe foreign-born people who live in the U.S. without legal permission.

### **Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)**

Agency of the Department of Homeland Security which conducts enforcement and removal operations pertaining to immigration violations, as well as investigating crimes which involve the transit of the U.S. border.

### **Immigrant**

Any person in the United States who is foreign-born.

### **Lawful Permanent Resident**

Individuals who have been lawfully accorded the privilege of residing permanently in the U.S. as an immigrant, in accordance with immigration laws.

**Migrant**

Any person who moves from one place to another, especially in order to find work or better living conditions. Migrants can be “immigrants” if they intend to stay permanently in a country other than their place of birth or “non-immigrants” if they intend to stay temporarily.

**Naturalized Citizenship**

The conferring, by any means, of citizenship after birth.

**Refugee**

Status granted to an individual, prior to departure for and arrival in the United States, who has been determined by competent authority to be fleeing persecution or have a well-founded fear of persecution in their own country because of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion.

**Sources:**

Bipartisan Policy Center - <https://bipartisanpolicy.org/>

Department of Homeland Security - <https://www.dhs.gov/>