Welcoming Guide

STUDENTS OF WELCOME

PREFACE

Whether this is your first gathering with Students of Welcome or you're back for another year, we're glad you're here.

It's been a hard year to watch a screen. We've seen immigrants shot in their own cars by federal agents, watched neighbors and classmates disappear into detention, and felt the country's politics pull further apart by the week. It would be easy to decide hope has nowhere left to stand. We don't believe that. We believe a nation can hold both law and grace — that respecting the rule of law and welcoming the stranger were never opposites — and that students are positioned to prove it.

In spring 2026, students from the University of South Carolina went to the border to learn about asylum and the history of the border for themselves. Wheaton College students organized a whole movement of prayer and action during Operation Midway in Chicago for their immigrant neighbors, and after so many got involved and organized together, Wheaton decided to join Students of Welcome as an official chapter.

Whether you're new here or returning, hope is what we build next, together. A new school year means new faces, new conversations, and new opportunities to build the kind of campus community we believe is possible. This guide is here to help you do that well, to walk into this year with clarity about who we are, what we believe, and how to invite others in. I worked with college students in

England for a long time with the campus ministry, Agapé (Cru in the US) and have seen the impact students can have as they are shaped by the gospel and live that out. I am excited to see what God can do this year with you involved in Students of Welcome as we learn about immigration together, find ways to serve, and raise our voices for a better country for all of us, immigrants and native-born alike.

Grace and peace,

Christy Staats



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Students of Welcome Overview

Our Three Pillars

Guiding Principles

What can this look like on my campus?

A Note from Allie

Theology of Migration

Common Immigration Myths

How to have a conversation about immigration

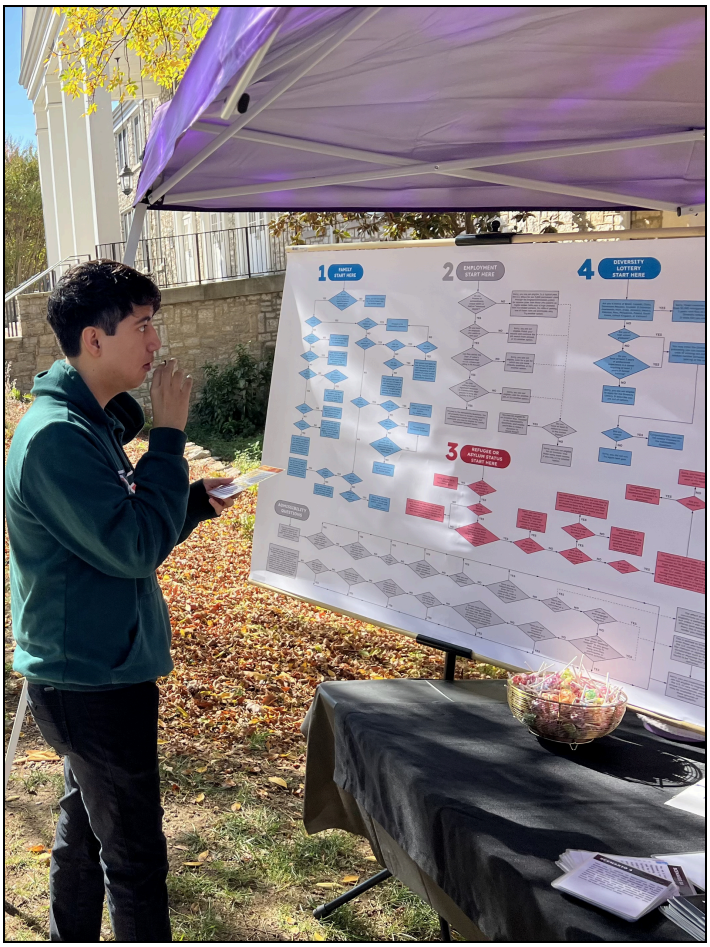
Activities

STUDENTS OF WELCOME: Overview

Students of Welcome is a **national**, **nonpartisan**, **student-led** movement launched in 2024 by the Forum (formerly the National Immigration Forum). At its core, Students of Welcome exists to make conversations about immigration more informed, compassionate, and solutions-driven. Immigration is one of the most polarizing topics in American life right now, and that polarization makes it easy to avoid the conversation altogether. We exist to change that. We seek to create a Christ-like space for honest dialogue on campuses across the country about the ability to have an immigration system that balances firm, fair, and compassionate solutions.

The guiding idea is simple: immigration is not just a challenge to be managed, but an opportunity to be embraced. This perspective shapes how we host events, engage our peers, and see the people behind the headlines.

By joining Students of Welcome, you're part of something bigger than your campus. We love supporting you as you create spaces for thoughtful conversations about immigration in your own community on campus. But Students of Welcome is also part of the Forum's network of faith, law enforcement, business, and national security leaders who are advocating for bipartisan immigration solutions. As a Students of Welcome student leader, you have the opportunity to connect with students across the country through leadership opportunities, advocacy, trips, and shared learning. Together, we're building a national movement rooted in welcome, compassion, and hope.


1
2
4
3


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STUDENTS OF WELCOME: Three Pillars

EDUCATION - SERVICE - ADVOCACY

Students of Welcome works with three goals in mind: promoting education about America's complicated immigration system, serving immigrants in students' local communities, and advocating on a local and national scale for comprehensive system reform. Here are some ways that can look on your campus:

Education: Start a dialogue on your campus. This is the entry point for many students, and can look like a book group, a cross-cultural hangout, or a class discussion. Immigration touches theology, economics, politics, social work, and more! We can talk about immigration and learn together. What questions do you have? What questions do your friends have? We are happy to help you find speakers in our amazing network for bigger events or pass on book recommendations and resources for small dialogues. You can also find resources on our Instagram.

Service: We would love you to serve your community together and get to know people from other cultures. Some of these immigration conversations are so difficult because we don't know the people involved. Where is there an opportunity or a need near your school to create more community and serve? Maybe it's tutoring at a local elementary school or teaching English at a church nearby. Perhaps it's volunteering with a refugee resettlement organization like World Relief or Catholic Charities or finding an Immigrant Connection office to practice citizenship questions with an almost new American. Maybe you rally Americans and immigrants to serve at a local food pantry together. The specific activities you choose are less important than just picking something and jumping in!

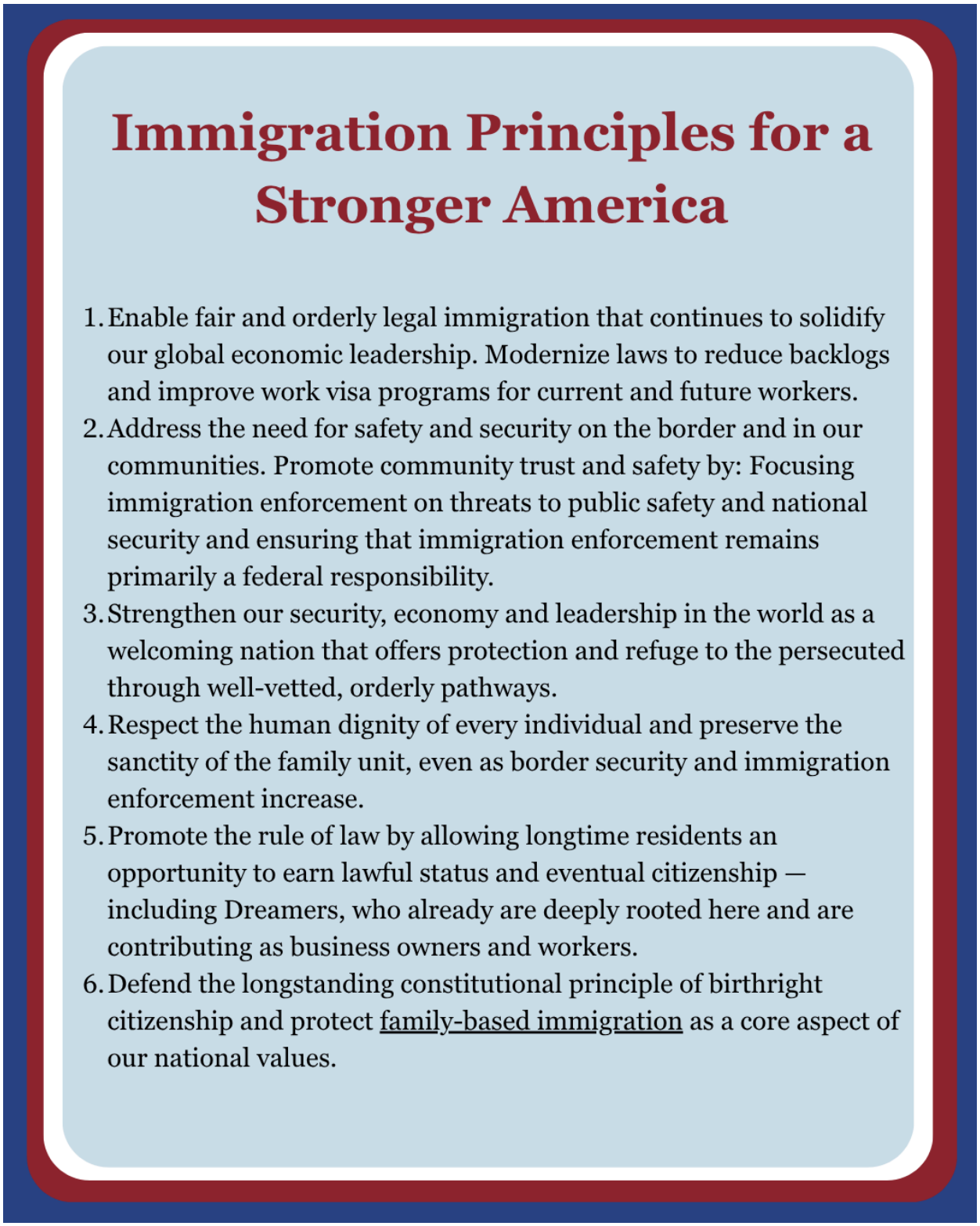
Advocacy:

Advocacy is one of the most powerful ways ordinary people can create extraordinary change. By meeting with local, state, and national leaders, signing petitions, sharing your story, writing editorials, volunteering, and

speaking up for your immigrant neighbors, you can help shape policies that reflect justice, compassion, and the common good. Every conversation, every signature, and every act of civic engagement has the potential to make a lasting difference. From learning how to message your members of Congress to joining us in DC to visit offices on Capitol Hill, we want to help you do this!

STUDENTS OF WELCOME: Guiding Principles

Students of Welcome is a faith-based initiative through the Forum, and aligns with the Forum's Immigration Principles. These are the policy goals we're working toward to bridge party lines and create better pathways to citizenship. You can see our principles here:



One thing to know about the Forum: they are not a Christian organization, but many Christians work there and are on the board. They have a series of faith-based initiatives run by believers, and Students of Welcome is one of those. Some of their other faith-based programs include Women of Welcome, We Choose Welcome, English Advance in Churches, and the convening of the Evangelical Immigration Table.

What could this look like on my campus?

We have two different models of Students of Welcome: **Partner** and **Chapter campuses**.

Partner Campus	Chapter Campus
• We partner with one student, professor, or organization on campus. • This can look like one or more collaboration events throughout the semester, where we work together to plan and execute an event about immigration. • Partner campuses collaborate with us as needed.	• A student-run cabinet meets, plans events, and considers what the needs of their campus may be. • They may be a chartered or unchartered organization on their campus. • Receive regular coaching and support from Students of Welcome. • 1-2 hour a week time commitment.

You're welcome to pursue whichever of these models sounds most exciting to you! **Either way, here are a few concrete steps towards getting involved:**

- Sign up through the interest and newsletter form
  - Professors can sign up for our newsletter and immigration curriculum here
- Join our Student GroupMe
- Every other week, we host a National Students of Welcome call. On these calls we have discipleship, policy updates, sharing from various schools, and suggested action steps. You can find the link to those calls in the GroupMe or through our newsletter.
- Follow our Instagram!


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A Note from Allie:

Allie Oberhelman in Iowa was one of the first students to help us launch Students of Welcome at her school as a freshman. We are excited for more of you to join Allie and us around the country as we make our campuses and America change course on how we treat and welcome immigrants together.



“I joined Students of Welcome because I am passionate about learning more about the immigration system in the United States. I love bridging barriers of misunderstanding by helping others understand the system better.

Students of Welcome has provided me with countless opportunities to learn and grow in my understanding of immigration in the United States!”

Theology of Migration

The Bible calls for both charity and justice to guide how we treat the foreigner. It also weaves together a thread through the Old and New Testaments of remembering the grace that God has given to his people and reminding them they were strangers, they were foreigners, and God has given them mercy as a foundation for how they treat immigrants. In Deuteronomy 10:17–19, God calls to love the sojourner/immigrant/alien as the Israelites were once aliens themselves in the land of Egypt. The Bible calls on God's people to not only accept but to welcome these sojourners, to love them as if they were your own: Leviticus 19:33–34, "**When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.**" God had care for the immigrant built into the laws he gave his people and tied it to them remembering their time as foreigners in Egypt. Numbers 15:15-16 gives a challenging word for how God's people were to govern towards immigrants, "**You and the foreigner shall be the same before the Lord: [16] The same laws and regulations will apply both to you and to the foreigner residing among you.**'"

God constantly commands the Israelites to not forget their roots, to remember they were once oppressed, and to ensure that does not continue; Exodus 23:9 "**You shall not oppress a sojourner. You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.**" God even goes a step further in Psalm 146:9, guaranteeing protection for a special group of vulnerable folks that some theologians refer to as "**the quartet of the vulnerable,**" these being the widow, the orphan, the poor, and the immigrant. At the end of the Old Testament in Malachi 3:5, God elaborates, showing that he will swiftly judge anyone who casts aside, oppresses, or denies justice to the quartet of the vulnerable, including the immigrant. We see across Scripture people migrating to follow God, because of persecution, and desperation like famine. In short, the very stories and DNA of the Bible are rooted in an immigrant narrative. When we get to the New Testament, we see Jesus and his parents flee to Egypt to escape Herod's murder of baby boys. While this is long before the United States helped develop global refugee definitions, this is what it means to be a refugee: fleeing to another land because of imminent danger. Jesus reiterates the commands to God's people throughout the Old Testament in Matthew 25 but takes it a step

further: How we treat the immigrant or sojourner is how we treat Jesus himself.



God explains time and time again that immigrants should be treated with the same respect as someone of your own flesh and blood. In fact, in Deuteronomy 24:19, this idea is expanded upon when God indicates that gleaning is an essential form of giving. It should be noted that this was not simply charity; rather, it provided vulnerable people with the opportunity and dignity of work to sustain themselves. In summation, the Bible advocates not just for acceptance but for helping immigrants secure both material survival and the personal agency required to thrive in a new land. While we are not under the Mosaic law in the United States, these are challenging principles to how God calls his people to the just and kind treatment of foreigners.

It's impossible to discuss the biblical call to welcome immigrants without discussing Romans 13. Addressing the context in which the verse is embedded, we see that Paul wrote Romans to a newly founded church in the midst of the Roman Empire. On one side were the Zealots who wanted to revolt against the empire, as their true allegiance was to only God and not any earthly empire. On the other side were the tax collectors who were completely cooperating with an often-corrupt Roman state. Paul establishes that God endorses government order to restrain human wickedness and

maintain peace. However, Paul also limits the state's power, noting that it does not possess absolute, God-like authority. If we zoom out to get more context for Roman's 13, we can read it comes on the back of Romans 12:9-13: "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality" and verse 21: "Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good." We can disagree about the number of refugees the US should accept a year or what quotas of visas we should have available, but we have all watched patterns of how immigrants have been treated that don't square up with what Jesus commands of us.



So, what do we do with injustice happening in the country towards immigrants as we also see in Romans 13, the idea of also trying to obey authorities? We must acknowledge that the law is not always just and that everything legislated is not necessarily correct. Biblical examples like Nebuchadnezzar ordering people to worship an idol show clear instances of where Christians are required to disobey laws that conflict with God's commands. The Bible is not clear on what our policies should be, but it does call for the just treatment of immigrants. Even more so it calls for Christians to

care for the vulnerable, do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. The Gospel reminds us that we were once strangers, alienated from God, and he has brought us into a relationship with him, redeemed us, and calls us to live as Kingdom-minded people here on earth. That grace and mercy of the Gospel should shape how we view ourselves and how we treat immigrants, people whom Jesus loves and died for, many of whom are even fellow Christians.

Common Immigration Myths

Immigration is one of the most talked-about topics in America, and also one of the most misunderstood. As Students of Welcome members, you will encounter these misconceptions regularly. The goal here is not to win arguments but to offer accurate information with patience and grace. Here are three of the most common myths you will encounter and how to respond to them.

Myth 1: "Immigrants are draining our public benefit system."

Despite being one of the most pervasive myths, the facts push back hard against it. The reality is that most immigrants, documented or not, are largely excluded from federal benefits programs. Undocumented immigrants are not eligible for SNAP, Medicaid, Social Security, federal housing assistance, CHIP, or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. Even many documented immigrants classified as "qualified' under federal law must wait five years after obtaining legal status before accessing most of these programs. Meanwhile, undocumented immigrants still pay into the tax system, contributing an estimated $11.74 billion to state and local economies each year, without being able to access many of the programs their taxes fund.

For more detail, see the the Forum's fact sheet on immigrants and public benefits.

Myth 2: "Immigrants are taking our jobs."

The labor market is not a fixed pie where one person's gain is another's loss. Research consistently shows that immigration is associated with a net gain in job availability for workers, not a reduction. Immigrants tend to fill gaps in the labor market rather than displace native-born workers. In fact, immigrants make up roughly one-fifth of the U.S. labor force, and sectors that depend heavily on immigrant workers like construction and food production are currently experiencing real shortages and rising costs as enforcement has reduced that workforce. The jobs argument also misses a larger picture. Immigrants start businesses, pay taxes, and spend money in local economies, all of which creates jobs rather than eliminates them. The Forum's report on workforce challenges goes deeper on this.

Myth 3: "Immigrants bring crime into our communities."

Research has found that immigrants, including undocumented immigrants, are less likely to commit crimes than native-born U.S. citizens. A 2020 study analyzing crime data from Texas found that U.S. citizens were twice as likely to be arrested for violent crimes, two and a half times as likely to be charged with drug offenses, and four times as likely to be arrested for property crimes compared to undocumented immigrants. This pattern repeats itself at all levels, for both violent and nonviolent crime. The persistent association between immigration and crime says more about media coverage and political rhetoric than it does about reality. The Law Enforcement Immigration Task Force's fact sheet on immigrants and crime is a reliable resource for going further on this topic as well as a paper from the Libertarian CATO Institute.

How to have a conversation about immigration

Immigration conversations can go sideways fast. Whether it is a classmate at a tabling event, a friend at dinner, or a family member over the holidays, you will encounter people who hold strong opinions. The good news is that you do not need to have all the answers to have a good conversation. You just need to show up with curiosity, grace, and patience.



Here are a few principles to keep in mind before you engage.

- First, lead with questions, not corrections. It is hard for someone to stay defensive when you ask, “can you tell me more about that?” or “what has shaped your thinking on this?” Curiosity disarms people in a way that facts rarely do.
- Second, find common ground before you introduce anything new. Most people, regardless of where they land politically, agree that families matter, that hard work should be rewarded, and that people deserve to be treated with dignity. Starting from shared values like family, hard work, and fairness creates a foundation for a more meaningful conversation.
- Third, stories land harder than statistics. If you have a personal connection with someone with an immigration story, share it. It is very hard to argue with a human experience.
- Fourth, it is okay to say you do not know. You do not need to be an expert on immigration to share your heart for welcoming newcomers. If you do not know the answer to a question, acknowledge it, and suggest looking into it together rather than guessing.

- Fifth, for faith-based conversations, the Imago Dei is a baseline almost no one can argue with. Starting from the shared belief that every person is made in the image of God gives the conversation a foundation that transcends politics.
- Finally, if a conversation gets heated online, step away before responding. Responding in a moment of frustration rarely moves anyone. Give yourself time to breathe, pray if that is part of your practice, and come back to the conversation from a place of calm rather than reaction.

These are just a few generalized points of advice. For a deeper dive into these principles, watch the Students of Welcome webinar on navigating hard conversations. Welcome.US also has a practical conversation guide and a list of five tips for talking about immigration with friends and family that are worth looking over before your next event. Partner with a local immigrant services nonprofit, detention center, or shelter to ensure items reach people directly.

Activities

This section contains ready-to-run activity ideas organized into three categories: **Serve**, **Educate**, **and Advocate**. Each activity is designed to be low-barrier, adaptable to your campus context, and achievable without significant funding or infrastructure. Use these activities as a launchpad for future club endeavors.



SERVE

Activity 1 - Resource Drive: Partner with a local immigrant services nonprofit, detention center, or shelter to collect items for refugees and immigrants in your community. Ask students to donate (new) essential items when moving out or moving in or at any time during the year. Items might include toothbrushes, toothpaste, soap, shampoo, clothing, towels, or laundry detergent. Set up a packing station where volunteers can sort and bag donations. Include a card-writing station where participants can write a short note of welcome or care to accompany the items, along with a fun drawing.

Activity 2 - ESL Conversation Practice: Reach out to local immigrant-serving organizations and offer student volunteers for informal English conversation practice sessions. These are not formal tutoring sessions but rather simple practice. Students simply show up to talk, listen, and engage. This works well as a recurring weekly or biweekly commitment rather than a one-time event, since consistency builds trust. Coordinate with the partnering organization on logistics; they will often provide the space and participants. The Forum has a curriculum called English Advance that churches purchase if you want to mobilize local churches near your college to get involved. Ask us about it!

Activity 3 - Career Help: Host drop-in sessions where students offer skills-based help to immigrants or refugees in your community. This could include resume reviews, LinkedIn profile help, mock interviews, or guidance on how U.S. job hunting typically works. Recruit volunteers with relevant experience (business, communications, HR) and advertise through your campus career center. Partner with a local workforce development nonprofit to connect with people who would benefit. Your student help center or career center could be a great place to host this.

Activity 4 - Citizenship Test Prep: Work with a local organization that serves immigrants pursuing naturalization to offer study sessions or practice tests. The civics portion of the naturalization test is publicly available from USCIS, so no proprietary materials are needed. Volunteers can run flashcard drills, practice Q&A, and offer encouragement. This pairs naturally with Activity 3 in the Educate section below.

Activity 5 - Food Pantry Support: Volunteer as a group at an existing food pantry, particularly one that serves immigrant or refugee populations. Many food pantries welcome regular student volunteer groups for sorting, distribution, and setup. This is a reliable, low-planning activity. If your campus has its own food pantry, consider asking for it to carry culturally relevant foods.



EDUCATE

Activity 1 - Cultural Potluck: Invite students to bring a dish from their own culture, attempt to cook something from another culture, or pick up food from a local restaurant representing a culture they want to learn about. Encourage attendees to share the story behind their dish or what caught their eye about the dish. The goal is conversation and breaking bread.

Activity 2 - Simulate the Immigration System: Run a structured simulation of the U.S. immigration process. Assign participants different immigrant profiles from different visa categories, countries of origin, and family situations (asylum, refugee, victim of trafficking, family member of a US citizen, etc.) and walk them through realistic scenarios including paperwork, waiting periods, unexpected setbacks (status changes, application denials, missing documents), and fees. Debrief afterward with a facilitated discussion about what surprised people and what the experience revealed. The point of this activity is to be long and tedious. You can simulate real wait times by treating each year as a minute in between steps. Keep the scenarios fun but

ultimately grounded; try to work with someone who knows the immigration process well.

Activity 3 - Mock Citizenship Test: Set up a table in a public campus space with Students of Welcome materials and offer passersby a chance to take a mock civics test. Use the official U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services questions. If someone passes the test, give them a small prize. Use the interaction as an entry point to share information about your group, upcoming events, and how to get involved. Include a QR code linking to your group's communication channel for easy follow-up.



ADVOCATE

Activity 1 - Contact Your Elected Officials: Rally your school to contact their members of Congress in support of better immigration policies. We provide updates on potential legislation, and calls to action through letters and phone calls. Congressional offices tally the messages they get on issues to inform them how they should vote. A lot of public pressure really matters! We also

have advocacy days in DC if you would like to meet your congressional offices in person to share your story and why you care!

Activity 2 – Student Government Resolutions: Pass a pro-dignity immigration resolution in your student government body at your school. How do you want immigrants to be treated? You could write a message about the value of Dreamers and Documented Dreamers on your campus that you stand behind. Are there immigration actions or words from public officials that are dehumanizing towards immigrants in your community? Put together a statement on why you expect better and that immigrants are made in the image of God and worthy of dignity, care, and that dehumanizing rhetoric is not what we want from elected officials no matter what differences we want on immigration policies. Tell the local press about your resolutions.

Activity 3 - Creative Communication: Be creative! Christian women in Tennessee took part in a quilting event and after the quilts were built, they delivered them to their members of Congress with messages on each square calling for change to how they legislate toward immigrants. You could design postcards and have a writing party to send to elected officials asking for change. We are happy to help with ideas and share what other schools are doing on Instagram.

Activity 4 - Calling All Writers: Write letters to the editor and opinion pieces on a better immigration system, fixing a particular policy that is broken, and even to encourage a posture on how we should treat immigrants whether they are long term members of our community, or international students or anything in between. We are happy to give you tips for getting published!