



How Ten Stories about Immigrant Leaders Can Move a Community

By Frances Caballo

Designing an immigrant integration workshop last fall, Kelly LaFlamme of the **Endowment for Health** and Deborah Schachter of the **New Hampshire Charitable Foundation (NHCF)** wondered how they could enrich a theoretical discussion with the voices of newcomers in their state.

But how could they do so without having an unwieldy number of immigrants and refugees on a panel?

Then the light bulb went on: They could compile profiles of immigrant and refugee leaders and share them with the workshop participants. With a team of writers, a photographer, and a graphic designer, they partnered with GCIR to produce *Immigrants and Refugees: Ten Profiles of Leadership*. This collection of stories sheds light on the varied backgrounds of newcomers to the state, the challenges they faced in their homelands, and the talents and skills they bring to their new communities. On the day of the workshop, which GCIR co-sponsored, poster-sized photos were on display along with printed copies of the profiles.

Following the briefing, NHCF mailed the booklet to 3,500 board members, donors, and prospective donors. In her cover letter, Schachter quoted survey results indicating that between 2000 and 2006 New Hampshire had experienced declines in the trust of and attitude toward people of color and immigrants. The response to the mailing was extremely positive, ranging from "I didn't know the depth of their expertise" to "I had no idea New Hampshire was changing in this way."

"This was probably the most feedback and attention that the foundation had ever received for a publication," Schachter notes. The feedback also included kudos for the writing and photography, as well as the bronze award in the special reports category of the 2008 Wilmer Shields Rich Awards for Excellence in Communications.

The 10 stories have permeated the community in ways no one anticipated. For example, one afternoon a teacher started reading a story from the booklet to initiate a discussion on hardship when one of her students realized that the instructor was talking about his grandmother. When he went home that afternoon he squealed, "Grandma, you're famous!" In addition, business leaders contacted the foundation and thanked it for generating the publication. The senior community asked for additional copies, and one man, who had fostered one of the lost boys of the Sudan, requested another copy for his foster son.

Schachter said her foundation will continue to partner with LaFlamme's and devise a strategy to use the publication effectively. They both understand the publication's potential for raising funds for immigrant-led organizations and note that an anonymous donor has already donated \$5,000 to one of the nonprofits led by an individual that was profiled.

The booklet has been critical, Schachter believes, in raising the profile of newcomers. "It is a bridge to donors and helps to further the dialogue that we want to have with them."

LaFlamme believes the publication helps traditional funders gain a better understanding of immigrant- and refugee-led organizations as well. "These organizations have certain strengths that don't always shine through on paper in the traditional ways that foundations interact with them. So how do we honor these strengths within the structure that foundations have?"

Schachter and LaFlamme caution against idolizing the profiled leaders. "They are amazing and they have done so much but they need to remain symbolic of the larger pool of talent and assets that the newcomer community brings to New Hampshire," Schachter says. "It can't just be about these 10 individuals."

Even among this talented group, there is a certain vulnerability they are sensitive to as LaFlamme mentions that out of this group of 10 leaders, two have already moved on. "I've learned how delicate their leadership is and that we need to find ways to support the continued growth of new leaders."

Both women view this publication as just the beginning of an ongoing discussion on immigrant integration in their state. Schachter says, "We're seeing it as one step along the way with funders who are interested in this topic, and we continue to look for new voices of community leaders to bring into the room."