A California Blueprint for Immigrant Socioeconomic Prosperity

IMMIGRANTS RISING
TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH EDUCATION

Introduction

California's economic future depends on the full participation of its immigrants, including the nearly 2 million undocumented Californians who live, work, and study across the state. They are already central to California's economy:

- 1 in 3 Californians is an immigrant
- Nearly 1 in 10 workers is undocumented
- Undocumented immigrants contribute $8.5 billion annually in state and local taxes

Yet state systems have not been designed to allow their full participation. California invests in education, workforce development, and small business growth, but too often, undocumented Californians are unable to translate that investment into stable income, career mobility, or business growth.

This blueprint is grounded in the work of Immigrants Rising, a California-based nonprofit organization with nearly two decades of experience advancing access to higher education, career pathways, and entrepreneurship for undocumented people. It reflects a focused economic mobility strategy—not a comprehensive immigration agenda—centered on the systems that most directly shape whether undocumented Californians can learn, work, and build livelihoods.

This is not only an equity issue: it is a matter of economic efficiency and statewide prosperity.

California has led the nation in expanding opportunities for undocumented individuals, but that progress has not reached everyone and is now under real threat. The next Governor must both protect these gains and ensure that state systems translate opportunity into meaningful economic participation by:

- Ensuring the full education pipeline from K-12 through higher education is protected and leads to viable economic pathways
- Aligning workforce and entrepreneurship systems with the realities of undocumented Californians
- Building durable, coordinated systems that enable undocumented Californians to fully participate in education, the workforce, and economic opportunity.

This blueprint outlines a focused, actionable agenda for the next Governor. The answer is clear: removing structural barriers and enabling undocumented Californians' full participation and contribution will strengthen California's economy.

Strategic Priorities & Key Recommendations

1. Protect and Expand Higher Education Access and Affordability

Goal: Secure the full education pipeline—from K-12 through higher education—while ensuring students have the financial resources and institutional support to succeed.

Key Actions:

- Enshrine the right to K-12 education regardless of immigration status in California's Constitution
- Defend and preserve in-state tuition eligibility as a cornerstone of access
- Establish a California Pell Grant equivalent
- Strengthen the CA Dream Loan Program
- Streamline and align financial aid systems, including support for graduate and professional education pathways
- Ensure access to emergency and basic needs support
- Codify and permanently fund Dream Resource Centers and Liaisons across all public systems
- Expand access to K-12 Dream Resource Centers
- Integrate financial literacy education that reflects student realities

2. Create Viable Career Pathways

Goal: Ensure that education leads to income, employment, and long-term economic mobility.

Key Actions:

- Scale campus-based employment opportunities for undocumented students
- Expand inclusive work-based learning models (fellowships, project-based work, entrepreneurship)
- Remove barriers to professional licensing and required training hours
- Support employment sponsorship and legal transition pathways
- Integrate entrepreneurship as a core career pathway
- Expand recognition of foreign education and prior learning
- Require coordinated, immigrant-inclusive workforce systems statewide

3. Advance Entrepreneurship as an Economic Strategy

Goal: Treat entrepreneurship as a primary pathway to economic stability and growth.

Key Actions:

- Fund and scale SEED as a statewide flagship program
- Expand access to capital and financing tools
- Ensure immigrant-inclusive design across all state programs
- Invest in culturally responsive technical assistance
- Modernize business licensing and regulatory systems
- Assess the impacts of worker classification policies (AB 5) on income pathways

4. Build Durable State Infrastructure for Inclusion

Goal: Ensure systems are coordinated, accountable, and designed for full participation.

Key Actions:

- Ensure immigrant-inclusive representation in boards and commissions
- Establish a Governor's Office of Immigrant Socioeconomic Inclusion
- Implement privacy-first, secure data systems that enable both participation and informed decision-making
- Include undocumented Californians in state data and planning systems using safe, aggregated approaches
- Protect access to driver's licenses as essential economic infrastructure
- Affirm immigrant inclusion as a core economic strategy for California

Conclusion

Undocumented Californians have been educated in our schools, trained in our colleges, and contributed meaningfully to our communities and economy. They are central to the state's workforce and to California's identity as a place of innovation and opportunity.

But without deliberate action, that investment is at risk. When talented Californians are blocked from education, work, or career pathways, the state weakens its own economic future.

The responsibility of the next Governor is clear. California must build on its progress and ensure that education and economic systems work in practice, protecting the pipeline, enabling real pathways to employment, and supporting entrepreneurship as a viable avenue for mobility.

This is both a moral and economic imperative. With focused leadership, California can protect its investments, unlock the full potential of its people, and continue to lead as a state where innovation and opportunity thrive.

To read the full Blueprint visit: immigrantsrising.org/ca-blueprint-2026.