IMMIGRANTS RISING
TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH EDUCATION

May 2026

A California Blueprint for Immigrant Socioeconomic Prosperity

Las Guerreras in their kitchen.

Immigrants Rising Board of Directors and executive team.

Table of Contents

Letter From the Executive Director 3

About Immigrants Rising 4

About This Blueprint 4

Introduction 5

Protect and Expand Higher Education Access & Affordability for Undocumented Students 7

Create Viable Career Pathways For Undocumented Californians 10

Advance Immigrant Entrepreneurship as an Economic Strategy 13

Build Durable State Infrastructure for Immigrant Socioeconomic Inclusion 16

Conclusion 19

References 20

Acknowledgements 23

Letter From the Executive Director

For nearly two decades, Immigrants Rising has worked at the intersection of policy, practice, and lived experience, advancing solutions that expand access to education, career pathways, and economic opportunity for undocumented people.

My connection to this work is also personal. As someone who navigated higher education as an undocumented student in California and a career without access to DACA, I experienced firsthand both the barriers and the impact of policy. That perspective continues to shape how I approach this work today.

We are proud to share this **California Blueprint for Immigrant Socioeconomic Prosperity**, grounded in nearly two decades of experience and informed by the realities facing undocumented Californians in this moment.

We felt a responsibility to put this forward. In conversations across the state, it became clear that many gaps remain for the full inclusion of undocumented immigrants, especially those tied to economic mobility. At the same time, federal actions continue to create uncertainty and harm, making state leadership more critical than ever.

This blueprint is our contribution to that gap.

It focuses on areas where we have the deepest expertise and where California has both the opportunity and obligation to lead: higher education, career pathways, and entrepreneurship. At its core, this is about ensuring that the state's systems work in practice, not just in principle, so that undocumented Californians can achieve their personal and career goals, as well as to fully participate in and contribute to the economy.

We offer this blueprint as a resource and an invitation to partner in advancing a more inclusive and economically strong California.

In solidarity,

Iliana Perez, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Immigrants Rising

About Immigrants Rising

Founded in 2006, Immigrants Rising is a California-based nonprofit that has played a defining role in expanding access to higher education, career pathways, and economic opportunity for undocumented people. For nearly two decades, the organization has helped shape both policy and practice—advancing landmark efforts that opened doors to higher education access and affordability, while also pioneering models, tools, and policy strategies that enable undocumented people to navigate career pathways, generate income, and build economic stability, particularly through entrepreneurship.

Immigrants Rising envisions a future where all people can pursue an education and career with confidence and without constraint, regardless of their immigration status. Its mission is to create opportunities and resources for undocumented people to achieve their educational and career goals through personal, institutional, and policy transformation.

The organization focuses its work on undocumented people ages 18-45—primarily in California—who are navigating transitions into and through higher education, careers, and entrepreneurship. Through a combination of scalable tools, institutional partnerships, applied research, and policy advocacy, Immigrants Rising operates as both a direct support provider and a systems-change leader, helping ensure that opportunity is not only expanded but also accessible in practice.

About This Blueprint

This blueprint reflects Immigrants Rising's specific role, experience, and strategic focus. It is not intended to serve as a comprehensive agenda for all immigrant communities or all immigration policy issues. Instead, it advances a targeted set of recommendations grounded in Immigrants Rising's deepest expertise and most sustained impact: higher education access and affordability, career pathways, and entrepreneurship as core drivers of economic mobility.

The recommendations that follow are informed by nearly two decades of work at the intersection of policy, practice, and lived experience, designed to: (1) expand opportunity and (2) ensure systems function in ways that allow undocumented Californians to fully participate in and contribute to the state's economy.

Introduction

California's prosperity depends on the full participation of all immigrants, regardless of status. They are not peripheral to the state's success—they are foundational to it. Immigrants power key industries, build businesses at high rates, and form a critical part of the state's current and future workforce.[1]

Yet hundreds of thousands of undocumented Californians—students, workers, and entrepreneurs—remain systematically excluded from the very systems designed to drive economic mobility. They graduate from California schools and colleges, contribute billions in taxes, and sustain local economies, but are blocked from fully participating due to exclusionary federal policy and fragmented state systems.

This is both an equity gap and an economic inefficiency. California is investing in education, workforce development, and small-business growth while leaving a significant portion of its talent pipeline unable to fully integrate. **At a time of federal overreach, workforce shortages, rising costs, and economic uncertainty, the state cannot afford to leave behind the people who are already here, trained, and ready to work.**

Immigrants Rising team tabling at the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office's Undocumented Student Success Week Conference.

California must proactively and urgently advance a policy agenda that strongly counters the current anti-immigrant federal landscape. Though not exhaustive, the following immigration-related policies advanced by the federal administration will, and in many cases already have, resulted in real harm and consequences to Californians and the state's ability to thrive:[2]

- Litigation to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy, with a looming threat of ending work authorization for more than 86,000 recipients in Texas, who may consider relocating to states like California as a response[3]
- Proposed rule to severely restrict and pause work permits for asylum seekers[4]
- Excluding "non-domiciled" immigrants from accessing commercial driver licenses (CDLs), impacting 13,000 existing Californian drivers[5]
- Banning foreign nationals and non-citizens from accessing small business loans from the federal Small Business Administration, impacting 220,000 green card small business owners in California[6]
- Potentially requiring banks to collect citizenship information[7]
- Unprecedented data sharing agreements with federal immigration entities that disclose tax[8], health[9], travel[10], driving[11], and education[12] information
- Using racial profiling as a method for stopping, detaining, and deporting individuals[13]

The federal administration's unprecedented overreach and reconstruction of immigration policy has impacted how states, cities, and institutions of civic life respond to such attacks on immigrants. Some have responded with an under-the-radar approach, while others have embraced being vocal and visible. California has an opportunity and an urgent duty to complement existing community-led, state, and local efforts to

defend immigrant rights by advancing policy efforts that ensure undocumented immigrants can achieve socioeconomic prosperity.

California has led the nation in expanding access to higher education and public benefits for its residents, regardless of immigration status. The next phase of leadership requires moving beyond access toward system design—it is ensuring that education leads to viable economic pathways, that workforce and small-business systems function for all Californians to thrive, and that state infrastructure enables participation at scale.

This blueprint outlines an immigrant socioeconomic prosperity governing agenda to:

- Protect and expand higher education access and affordability
- Create viable career pathways
- Advance entrepreneurship as a core economic strategy
- Build durable state infrastructure for inclusion

Across the blueprint, the goal is consistent: align systems, remove structural barriers, and enable undocumented Californians to fully contribute to—and strengthen—California's economy.

FACTS & FIGURES

California's economy depends on immigrants, but current systems prevent full participation at scale.

- Approximately 2.9 million Californians are undocumented.[14]
- 3.3 million Californians live in mixed-status households, extending the impact of immigration policy across families and communities.[15]
- Nearly 1 in 10 workers in California is undocumented, underscoring their central role in the state's economy.[16]
- 2.3 million undocumented Californians remain partially excluded from core economic and public systems.[17]
- There are over 141,000 DACA recipients and over 343,000 DACA-eligible individuals in CA.[18]

Protect and Expand Higher Education Access & Affordability for Undocumented Students

California has made significant progress in expanding access to higher education for undocumented students.[19] However, that progress is built on a foundation that remains vulnerable. Access to higher education is only possible when students are able to fully participate in the state's K–12 system. This includes securing protections at the primary and secondary levels to sustain any gains in college access and completion.

Even within higher education, access remains incomplete and increasingly fragile when it is not paired with affordability and consistent institutional support. Rising costs, exclusion from federal financial aid, and fragmented state systems continue to limit students' ability not only to enroll, but to persist and complete. At the same time, core access policies face ongoing legal and political threats, putting decades of collective progress at risk.

California must move beyond access as an entry point and ensure that education systems are designed to support undocumented students from K-12 through postsecondary completion. This requires protecting foundational rights, closing affordability gaps, and building durable institutional infrastructure that makes opportunity real in practice.

Executive Director Dr. Iliana Perez and staff, with Assemblymember Jose Luis Solache, students, and community partners in the California State Capitol after AB 713 (the Opportunity for All Act) passed out of the Assembly Higher Education Committee.

Recommendations:

1. **Enshrine the right to K-12 education regardless of immigration status in California's Constitution.**

   Access to higher education for undocumented students is fundamentally dependent on access to K-12 education. If undocumented children are denied the ability to attend school, the state's investments in college access, affordability, and workforce development become null and void.

   The federal protection established under Plyler v. Doe guarantees access to K-12 education for undocumented students, but it remains vulnerable to ongoing legal and political attacks. California cannot rely solely on federal protections that may be weakened or overturned.

   California should proactively establish an independent, state-level constitutional guarantee to ensure uninterrupted access to K-12 education for all students, regardless of immigration status. Doing so protects the foundation of the state's education and workforce systems and ensures that pathways to higher education and economic mobility remain intact.

   California should:

   - Amend the state constitution to explicitly guarantee access to K-12 education for its residents, regardless of immigration status

- Affirm K-12 education as a foundational right that underpins higher education access and workforce participation

2. Protect in-state tuition eligibility.

California has allowed eligible undocumented students to access in-state tuition for more than two decades, making it one of the most consequential policies that expand college access and strengthen the state's workforce. This policy has broad support and has enabled hundreds of thousands of students to enroll in and complete higher education. However, ongoing legal challenges and federal threats place its long-term stability at risk.

California should defend and preserve in-state tuition as a cornerstone of its higher education and workforce strategy.

3. Create a California Pell Grant Equivalent.

Undocumented students are excluded from the federal Pell Grant—the nation's primary need-based financial aid program. This exclusion leaves a significant gap in aid for low-income students.

California should establish a permanent and guaranteed state-funded grant to close this gap and align aid with students' actual needs.

4. Strengthen the CA DREAM Loan Program.

The DREAM Loan program provides a regulated borrowing option for students excluded from federal loans, but its impact has been limited by design and implementation challenges. Without access to safe borrowing options, many students are forced to delay enrollment, reduce course loads, or stop out entirely.

California should:

- Reform repayment options to ensure long-term sustainability
- Improve program transparency and performance
- Redirect unused funds toward emergency and basic needs aid

5. Streamline and align state financial aid programs.

Students must currently navigate multiple programs with different requirements, timelines, and applications, creating unnecessary barriers. Fragmentation disproportionately affects undocumented students, who often already have less access to advising and institutional support.

California should:

- Align application and verification processes across programs
- Ensure state financial aid systems and institutional supports for undocumented students extend to graduate and professional education, recognizing that advanced degrees are a primary pathway to economic stability in the absence of traditional employment options
- Reduce administrative burden
- Ensure programs function as a coherent affordability system
- Fund the Cal Grant Reform Act

6. Ensure full participation in emergency aid programs.

Unexpected financial shocks can derail student progress. Undocumented students are often excluded from federally funded emergency aid.

California should ensure that undocumented students have burden-free access to emergency aid.

7. Codify and permanently fund Campus Dream Resource Centers (DRCs) and strengthen Dream Resource Liaisons.

DRCs provide centralized, on-campus support for undocumented students, including financial aid guidance, legal referrals, and academic & career advising. These supports are critical to persistence and completion but remain underfunded and uneven across institutions, resulting in staff burnout and high turnover in this key support role.

California should:

- Codify and fund DRCs across all public higher education systems
- Ensure dedicated, adequate funding for both DRCs and Liaisons
- Expand funding for K-12 Dream Resource Centers (authorized but currently unfunded)

8. Ensure equitable implementation of personal finance education requirements.

Financial literacy is essential to equitable and long-term economic mobility. California should ensure that the curriculum required under AB 2927 reflects the realities and needs of undocumented and immigrant students.[20]

FACTS & FIGURES

California's higher education gains for undocumented students depend on a stable K-12 pipeline and sustained investments in affordability and support. Without both, access remains incomplete and vulnerable.

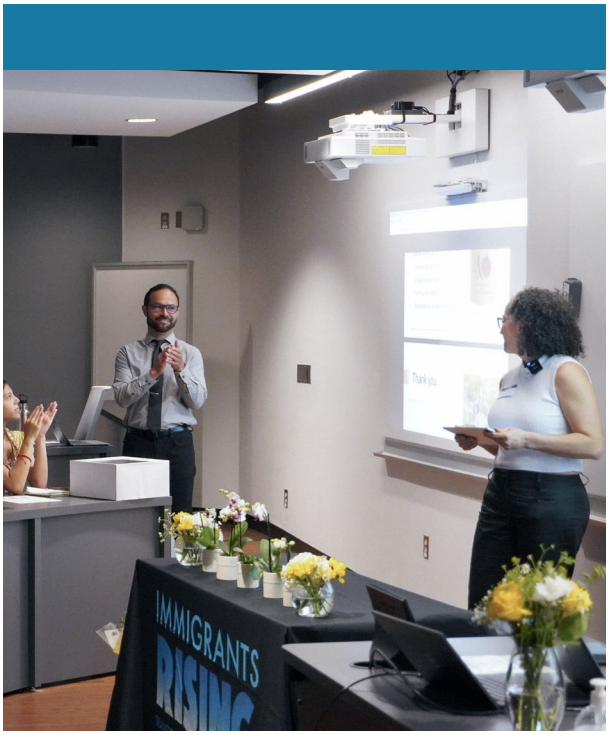
- California is home to an estimated 133,000+ undocumented students in K-12, forming a critical pipeline into higher education and the workforce.[21]
- 76,000+ students benefit from in-state tuition each year.[22]
- California has provided in-state tuition access for 20+ years (AB 540).[23]
- Nearly 100,000 undocumented students are enrolled in California higher education.[24]
- California has invested $52.2 million over five years in Dream Resource Centers and liaisons, yet funding remains inconsistent, and demand continues to grow.[25]
- Only 14% of eligible undocumented students receive state financial aid.[26]
- Nonresident tuition can exceed in-state tuition by more than $10,000 and $34,000 annually at the California State University and University of California, respectively.[27]
- Undocumented students remain excluded from federal Pell Grants and federal loans.[28]

Create Viable Career Pathways For Undocumented Californians

Undocumented Californians are educated in the state's schools and colleges, yet too often cannot translate that education into chosen careers or stable income. Federal work authorization limits restrict access to traditional employment, forcing many into informal or underpaid work despite their skills and training.

Through the Master Plan for Career Education and the establishment of the Education Interagency Council, California has invested heavily in creating a modernized career education system intended to prepare learners for the workforce by prioritizing hands-on learning and streamlined collaboration and partnership that lead to career-sustaining jobs. Without intentional inclusion of undocumented learners, only some Californians will benefit from such economic opportunities.

Without deliberate state action, California risks creating a system in which education fails to lead to economic mobility for a significant and vital portion of its population.



Immigrants Rising staff and participants at the 2025 Rise & Thrive Pitch Competition.

Recommendations:

1. **Make available institutional employment models for undocumented students.**

   California's Supreme Court has affirmed that higher education institutions may not discriminate in campus employment based on immigration status—a critical precedent advanced through the Opportunity for All Campaign.[29]

   California should:

   - Ensure equitable access to campus-based employment across public systems
   - Treat student employment as part of the educational experience, in alignment with many existing earn-and-learn models

2. **Expand inclusive work-based learning models for students without work authorization.**

   While California's undocumented students wait for the California Supreme Court's ruling above to be fully implemented, alternative models are essential to earning income and gaining experience.

   California should:

   - Pilot, scale, and fund inclusive fellowships, project-based work, and entrepreneurship-based experiences

- Partner with intermediaries and community organizations to integrate models into existing programs

3. Remove financial and structural barriers to completing required professional licensing and training pathways.

Many professional pathways require supervised hours that are inaccessible without work authorization. Without compensation, these requirements exclude individuals from participating and advancing their careers. At the same time, many professional licensing systems only recognize hours completed through formal employment, preventing qualified individuals from earning credit through alternative pathways.

California should:

- Provide stipends for required training, practicum, and supervised experience hours
- Allow required hours to be earned through non-employment pathways, including fellowships, training programs, and supervised practicums

4. Support employment sponsorship and legal pathway transitions.

Undocumented individuals—particularly DACA recipients and those with specialized skills—may be eligible for employer-sponsored visas, but these pathways are underutilized due to complexity, cost, and lack of support.

California should:

- Partner with initiatives such as Path2Papers to connect workers and employers with legal expertise
- Expand access to affordable or pro bono legal support
- Increase awareness among public institutions and employers of employer-sponsored visa pathways, and ultimately promote participation in such pathways
- Pilot employer engagement models

5. Include entrepreneurship as a core career pathway in higher education.

For many undocumented students, entrepreneurship is not just an option—it is a primary pathway to economic stability post-college. Most colleges and universities are not structured to support business creation as a primary career outcome, leaving students without clear pathways into entrepreneurship.

California should:

- Increase funding for entrepreneurship education and business development
- Integrate entrepreneurship into career services offices and academic certification
- Partner with community organizations to provide sustained mentorship and capital access

6. Expand recognition of foreign education and prior learning.

Many undocumented Californians bring prior education, training, and professional experience from other countries that are not recognized in U.S. systems, forcing them to restart educational and career pathways.

California should modernize credential recognition systems to ensure prior experience and international education are valued and can translate into workforce opportunities, particularly in high-demand industries such as healthcare, in alignment with the state's Credit for Prior Learning initiative.[30]

7. Require coordinated, immigrant-inclusive workforce systems across Workforce Development Boards.

Workforce systems often operate in silos and inconsistently serve undocumented communities. Without clear direction and accountability, access to state-funded workforce programs remains inconsistent across regions.

California should:

- Set statewide expectations for inclusion
- Tie funding to demonstrated outcomes
- Integrate entrepreneurship into workforce systems
- Align workforce development boards with small business and community-based partners
- Braid state funding for workforce development

FACTS & FIGURES

California is educating a critical workforce pipeline, but failing to translate that investment into viable economic pathways.

- Nearly 100,000 undocumented students are enrolled in California higher education institutions.[31]
- There's been no new access to DACA since 2017, translating into years of graduates without work authorization.[32]
- Students are trained for high-demand sectors (healthcare, education, climate, tech) but are blocked from formal employment despite workforce demand.[33]

Advance Immigrant Entrepreneurship as an Economic Strategy

For many undocumented Californians, entrepreneurship is not simply an alternative to traditional employment—it is often the only viable pathway to generate income, build assets, and achieve economic stability. Across California, immigrant entrepreneurs already play an outsized role in small-business creation, local economic activity, and job generation.[34] Furthermore, California has set a bold vision through the California Jobs First State Economic Blueprint, intended to create, attract, and ensure access to good-paying jobs for all Californians.[35]

Yet state systems have not been designed to fully support entrepreneurship. Undocumented entrepreneurs are largely excluded from traditional financing, face barriers in business licensing and regulatory systems, and often lack access to technical assistance that is culturally and structurally aligned with their needs. As a result, businesses that could grow, hire, and contribute on larger scales remain small or informal.

Advancing immigrant entrepreneurship is not a niche intervention—it is an economic strategy that can expand business formation, stabilize local economies, strengthen California's long-term growth, and, most importantly, empower immigrants to participate in the economy on their own terms.

Dr. Iliana Perez with a community member in front of the California State Capitol.

Recommendations:

1. **Fund SEED as California's flagship program for immigrant entrepreneurs.**

   The Social Entrepreneurs for Economic Development (SEED) Initiative provides grants, technical assistance, and business training to Californians with barriers to employment, including undocumented immigrants. It represents one of the only state-level investments specifically designed to unlock this segment of the economy. Research by Immigrants Rising has found a strong return on investment for SEED, clearly making it a cost-effective economic development strategy. SEED uses modest public investment to generate new businesses, support jobs, and expand economic participation among populations traditionally excluded from capital access. Yet, despite its strong output and community demand, SEED is only funded on a one-time basis.

   California should:

   - Permanently fund and scale SEED within the state's economic development infrastructure
   - Integrate SEED with broader small business and workforce systems to expand reach and impact

2. **Expand access to capital for undocumented entrepreneurs.**

Limited access to capital is one of the primary barriers to starting and growing businesses. Undocumented entrepreneurs are excluded from many traditional lending and federal programs, forcing them to rely on high-risk or informal financing.

California should:

- Develop state-supported financing mechanisms, including partnerships with CDFIs and community lenders
- Expand access to low-cost, flexible capital (including no-interest loans) that reflects the realities of immigrant entrepreneurs
- Reform underwriting criteria to account for non-traditional financial documentation and informal credit histories

3. **Ensure immigrant-inclusive design across state small business and entrepreneurship programs.**

Many state programs unintentionally exclude undocumented entrepreneurs through eligibility rules, documentation requirements, or a lack of targeted outreach.

California should:

- Standardize immigrant-inclusive eligibility language across business development programs
- Ensure program design, outreach, and implementation reach undocumented entrepreneurs
- Align small business, workforce, and economic development systems to reduce fragmentation

4. **Invest in culturally and structurally aligned technical assistance.**

Access to technical assistance is critical for business formation, compliance, and growth, but many existing services are inaccessible due to language barriers, documentation requirements, or a lack of trusted intermediaries.

California should:

- Invest in community-based organizations to deliver technical assistance
- Expand language access and culturally responsive support
- Coordinate technical assistance across CalOSBA, workforce systems, and local partners

5. **Modernize business licensing and regulatory systems to reduce barriers to business formation and growth.**

Business licensing, permitting, and compliance systems often create unnecessary barriers that delay or prevent entrepreneurs from formalizing and expanding their businesses. For many immigrant entrepreneurs, these barriers are compounded by language access challenges, complex requirements, and a lack of clear guidance.

California should:

- Streamline business licensing and permitting processes
- Expand acceptance of alternative documentation (e.g., ITINs)

- Provide clear, accessible pathways to compliance, including multilingual resources and support
- Ensure language access across business licensing agencies through translated materials, bilingual assistance, and community-based navigation
- Create “on-ramp” certifications that allow micro-businesses to qualify for small-scale public contracts

6. Assess and address the impact of worker classification policies (including AB 5) on entrepreneurship pathways.

AB 5 significantly narrowed the definition of who can be classified as an independent contractor, requiring many workers to be treated as employees rather than contract workers. While intended to strengthen labor protections, these changes have reduced access to contract and gig-based work. For undocumented Californians—who are often excluded from traditional employment due to work authorization barriers—independent contractor work is frequently one of the only viable pathways to generate income, build experience, and transition into entrepreneurship.

California should:

- Evaluate how worker classification rules affect access to contract-based and self-employment opportunities
- Identify targeted adjustments or complementary policies that preserve income-generating pathways while maintaining worker protections

FACTS & FIGURES

Entrepreneurship is not a niche pathway for undocumented Californians—it is a primary engine of income, stability, and economic contribution.

- There are more than 220,000 undocumented immigrant entrepreneurs in California.[36]
- About 40% of California's small businesses are owned by immigrants; nearly 11% of those are owned by undocumented immigrants.[37]
- Undocumented immigrants contribute $8.5 billion annually in state and local taxes.[38]

Build Durable State Infrastructure for Immigrant Socioeconomic Inclusion

Without durable systems, protections, and coordination, even the strongest policies will fail to reach the people they are intended to serve. Many of California's existing programs exclude or underserve undocumented Californians not because of intent, but because systems were not designed with them in mind. Building lasting infrastructure ensures that access translates into real participation and economic impact.

Immigrants Rising team with First Gen Empower Executive Director at the United We Stand Summit.

Recommendations:

1. **Ensure immigrant-inclusive representation in gubernatorial appointments.**

   Boards and commissions that oversee higher education, workforce development, and economic policy make decisions that directly shape access to opportunity. Yet they rarely reflect the lived experiences of immigrant communities.

   California should ensure that appointments to key governing bodies include individuals with experience working with, or directly representing, immigrant communities to better align policy decisions with on-the-ground realities.

2. **Establish a Governor's Office of Immigrant Socioeconomic Inclusion.**

   Responsibility for immigrant-related policy is currently fragmented across agencies, leading to inconsistent implementation and missed opportunities for coordination.

   California should establish a Cabinet-level office to coordinate cross-agency strategy, align policy and funding decisions, and ensure accountability for advancing immigrant socioeconomic inclusion statewide.

3. **Establish Secure, Privacy-Protected Data Systems that Enable Both Participation and Informed Decision-Making**

   Undocumented Californians face a fundamental barrier to participation in public programs: fear that their personal information could be shared or misused. Recent federal data access violations and expanded data-sharing efforts have deepened this concern, leading many individuals and families to avoid education, workforce, and economic programs altogether.

   At the same time, the absence of reliable data on undocumented Californians limits the state's ability to design effective policies, allocate resources, and measure outcomes. When communities are invisible in data systems, gaps in access and performance remain unaddressed.

These challenges are not in conflict—they point to the same need: data systems designed to protect individuals while enabling the state to understand and respond to community needs.

California should lead by establishing a model for privacy-first, purpose-limited data systems that prioritize safety, build trust, and generate actionable insights without exposing individuals to risk.

California should:

- Strengthen protections for sensitive personal data.
    - Protect personal identifying information (including immigration status, ITIN, CADAA, and health data) through stronger state data protection laws
    - Prohibit the use of state-held data for immigration enforcement or deportation actions to the fullest extent permitted by law
    - Establish clear limits on data sharing across agencies and with external entities
- Standardize privacy-first data practices across state systems.
    - Adopt consistent data governance, access controls, and security protocols across education, workforce, and economic agencies
    - Limit data collection to what is necessary for program delivery and evaluation ("data minimization")

Ensure transparency in how data is collected, used, stored, and protected

- Enable safe, anonymized, and aggregated data use for policy and planning.
    - Require systems such as the Cradle-to-Career Data System to produce outcomes for undocumented Californians using privacy-protected, aggregated data
    - Use disaggregated data only in forms that prevent individual identification, particularly in small populations or geographic areas
    - Establish independent oversight and auditing mechanisms to ensure compliance with privacy standards
- Build trust through community-informed data practices.
    - Engage community-based organizations and impacted communities in designing and governing data systems
    - Ensure language access and clear communication about data protections and rights
    - Recognize that participation depends on trust—and trust depends on credible, enforceable safeguards

4. Protect access to driver's licenses as economic infrastructure.

Access to a driver's license is essential for maintaining employment in large sectors of California's economy, particularly in logistics, construction, and care work. Recent federal actions restricting access to commercial driver's licenses (CDLs) for immigrants and license plate data tracking threaten both individual livelihoods and broader economic stability.

California should:

- Maintain access to noncommercial licenses
- Mitigate the impacts of federal CDL restrictions

5. Affirm immigrant contributions as central to California's economic strategy.

Public narrative shapes policy priorities, resource allocation, and institutional behavior. In a climate of increasing federal hostility and misinformation, the absence of clear state leadership can reinforce exclusion and underinvestment.

California should:

- Meaningfully integrate immigrant inclusion into statewide economic, workforce, and education priorities
- Use the Governor's platform, including budget priorities and public communications, to affirm immigrants as essential to California's prosperity
- Align state agencies and partners around this framing to ensure consistency in implementation

FACTS & FIGURES

Without coordinated state infrastructure, even strong policies remain fragmented—limiting impact, access, and accountability at scale.

- 2.3 million undocumented Californians remain partially excluded from core economic and public systems.[39]
- Local immigrant affairs offices exist (e.g., Los Angeles, San Francisco, San José, Orange County, etc.), but no statewide coordinating entity currently exists.
- More than 1 million Californians have obtained driver's licenses, including immigrants and undocumented individuals, which has already expanded access to work, education, and daily mobility.[40]

Conclusion

Undocumented Californians have been educated in our schools, trained in our colleges, and contribute meaningfully to our communities and economy. They represent a significant share of the state's current and future workforce, and they are central to California's identity as a place of innovation, ambition, and possibility.

But without deliberate action, that investment is at risk of being lost. When talented Californians are unable to access education, secure work, or build businesses and careers because of structural barriers, the state does not just fall short of its values. It weakens its own economic future.

The responsibility of the next Governor is clear: California must build on the progress it has already made to include undocumented Californians in its education and economic systems and ensure those systems work in practice. The education pipeline must be protected. Pathways from education to employment must be real. Entrepreneurship must be supported as a viable and necessary avenue for economic mobility.

This is both a moral and economic imperative. California has long been defined as a place where talent and hard work drive opportunity and innovation. Immigrants have always been central to that story.

This blueprint provides a path forward. With focused leadership, California can protect its investments, unlock the full potential of its people, and continue to lead as the state where innovation and opportunity thrive.

Dr. Iliana Perez, students, community partners, and staff from the UCLA Center for Immigration Law and Policy outside of the California Supreme Court for the hearing of Muñoz v. Regents of the University of California.

References

1 American Immigration Council. (2026). Map the Impact of Immigration: U.S. Economic Data & Numbers [MAP] - New American Economy. Data. https://data.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/map-the-impact/

2 Contreras, R. (2025, October 17). Exclusive: *Trump immigration plan may wipe out 15M jobs by 2035, study claims*. Axios. https://www.axios.com/2025/10/17/trump-immigration-workforce-economy

3 National Immigration Law Center. (2025, November 17). *Frequently Asked Questions: Latest DACA Developments*. https://www.nilc.org/resources/latest-daca-developments/

4 FWD.us. (2026, April 25). *Ending Work Authorization for Asylum Seekers Will Cost Billions*. https://www.fwd.us/news/asylum-work-permit-rule/

5 California Department of Motor Vehicles Office of Public Affairs. (2026, March 6). *Federal Government Requires California DMV to Cancel Certain Non-Domiciled Driver's Licenses*. California DMV. https://www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/news-and-media/federal-government-requires-california-dmv-to-cancel-certain-nondomiciled-drivers-licenses/

6 Sumagaysay, L. (2026, March 30). *Big change for California small businesses: No more SBA loans for non-citizens*. CalMatters. https://calmatters.org/economy/2026/03/sba-loans-green-card-holders/

7 Tecotzky, A. & Vlamis, K. (2026, April 16). *Banks may soon need citizenship data. That's likely bad for business*. Business Insider. https://www.businessinsider.com/banks-requirement-citizenship-data-executive-order-2026-4

8 Lang, M. J. (2026, April 15). *Drop in immigrant tax filings may cost government billions as IRS shares data with ICE*. The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/2026/04/15/tax-day-immigrant-filers-ice-arrests/

9 Katzenberger, T. (2025, December 29). *Trump admin can share immigrants' Medicaid data with ICE, judge rules*. POLITICO. https://www.politico.com/news/2025/12/29/trump-admin-can-share-immigrants-medicaid-data-ice-judge-rules-00707716?utm_medium=twitter&utm_source=dlvr.it

10 Williams, A. (2026, March 31). *California Senators Launch Inquiry Into TSA Data Sharing With ICE*. Los Angeles Magazine. https://lamag.com/news-and-politics/california-senators-launch-inquiry-into-tsa-data-sharing-with-ice/

11 Fry, W. & Johnson, K. (2026, February 26). *He saw an abandoned trailer. Then, he uncovered a surveillance network on California's border*. CalMatters. https://calmatters.org/justice/2026/02/alpr-border-patrol-caltrans/

12 EdScoop Staff. (2026, January 23). *California State University faculty settle lawsuit over personal data shared with federal government*. EdScoop. https://edscoop.com/california-state-university-faculty-settle-lawsuit-over-personal-data-shared-with-federal-government/

13 American Immigration Council. (2025, September 9). *How the Supreme Court's Latest Decision Clears the Way for Racial Profiling During Immigration Raids*. American Immigration Council. https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/blog/supreme-courts-decision-racial-profiling-immigration-raids/

14 Migration Policy Institute. (n.d.). *Profile of the Unauthorized Population: California*. MPI. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/unauthorized-immigrant-population/state/CA

15 Equity Research Institute at the University of Southern California. (n.d.). *California Immigrant Data Portal*. https://immigrantdataca.org/indicators/mixed-status-families#insights

16 Hayes, J. & Hill, L. (2017, March). *Undocumented Immigrants in California*. Public Policy Institute of California. https://www.ppic.org/publication/undocumented-immigrants-in-california/

17 Passel, J. S. & Krogstad, J. M. (2025, August 21). U.S. *Unauthorized Immigrant Population Reached a Record 14 Million in 2023*. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/race-and-ethnicity/2025/08/21/u-s-unauthorized-immigrant-population-reached-a-record-14-million-in-2023/

18 Migration Policy Institute. (2025). *Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Data Tools*. MPI. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-daca-profiles

19 California Student Aid Commission. (2023). *Renewing the Dream: Improving Financial Aid & College Affordability for California's Undocumented Students (p. 17)*. CSAC. https://www.csac.ca.gov/sites/default/files/file-attachments/renewing_the_dream_full_report.pdf

20 CalMatters. (2024). AB 2927: *Pupil instruction: high school graduation requirements: personal finance. Digital Democracy*. https://calmatters.digitaldemocracy.org/bills/ca_202320240ab2927

21 Deng, Beyond & Hill, Laura (2026, January). *California's K–12 Students*. Public Policy Institute of California. https://www.ppic.org/publication/californias-k-12-students/

22 California Student Aid Commission. (2022).

23 California Education Code §68130.5 (AB 540)

24 Higher Ed Immigration Portal. (2025). *California - Data on Immigrant Students*. Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration. https://www.higheredimmigrationportal.org/state/california/

25 Brumer, Delilah & Sosa, Mercy (2025, February 3). *Demand for immigration legal services spikes at California colleges*. CalMatters. https://calmatters.org/education/higher-education/college-beat/2025/02/dream-centers-legal-services/

26 California Student Aid Commission. (2023). *Renewing the Dream: Improving Financial Aid & College Affordability for California's Undocumented Students (p. 19)*. CSAC. https://www.csac.ca.gov/sites/default/files/file-attachments/renewing_the_dream_full_report.pdf

27 Immigrants Rising. (2025). *California In-State Tuition Tool*. https://immigrantsrising.org/in-state-tuition-tool/

28 Federal Student Aid. (n.d.). *Financial aid eligibility*. https://studentaid.gov/understand-aid/eligibility

29 Muchnik, A. (2025, November 8). *CA Supreme Court reaffirms UC cannot bar undocumented students from on-campus jobs*. Daily Bruin. https://dailybruin.com/2025/11/08/ca-supreme-court-reaffirms-uc-cannot-bar-undocumented-students-from-on-campus-jobs

30 California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. (n.d.). *Credit for Prior Learning*. https://www.cccco.edu/About-Us/Chancellors-Office/Divisions/Educational-Services-and-Support/credit-for-prior-learning

31 Higher Ed Immigration Portal. (2025). *California - Data on Immigrant Students*. Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration. https://www.higheredimmigrationportal.org/state/california/

32 UCLA Labor Center. (2017, September 5). *DACA Has Been Rescinded, This Is What You Need To Know*. https://labor.ucla.edu/daca-has-been-rescinded-this-is-what-you-need-to-know/

33 The Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, & American Immigration Council. (2023, August 2). *How Many Undocumented Students are in U.S. Colleges and Universities, and Who Are They? (Updated August 2024)*. Higher Ed Immigration Portal. https://www.higheredimmigrationportal.org/research/undocumented-students-in-higher-education-updated-march-2021/

34 American Immigration Council. (2026). *Map the Impact of Immigration: U.S. Economic Data & Numbers [MAP] - New American Economy*. Data. https://data.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/map-the-impact/

35 Governor Gavin Newsom, Director Dee Dee Myers, & Secretary Stewart Knox. (2025, February). *State Economic Blueprint*. Jobs First. https://jobsfirst.ca.gov/blueprint/

36 American Immigration Council. (n.d.). *Immigrants in California*. https://map.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/locations/california/

37 Bay Area Council Economic Institute & University of California, Merced. (2025). *The Economic Impact of Mass Deportation in California* (p. 33). https://www.bayareaeconomy.org/report/economic-impact-of-mass-deportation-in-california/

38 Davis, C., Guzman, M., & Sifre, E.. (2024). Tax Payments by Undocumented Immigrants. *In Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy* (p. 8). https://itep.org/undocumented-immigrants-taxes-2024/

39 Passel, J. S. & Krogstad, J. M. (2025, August 21). *U.S. Unauthorized Immigrant Population Reached a Record 14 Million in 2023*. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/race-and-ethnicity/2025/08/21/u-s-unauthorized-immigrant-population-reached-a-record-14-million-in-2023/

40 Fry, W. (2023, January 27). *More than a million undocumented immigrants gained driver's licenses in California*. CalMatters. https://calmatters.org/california-divide/2023/01/drivers-licenses-undocumented-immigrants/

Acknowledgements

Immigrants Rising extends its deep appreciation to Audrey Dow, Partner at Secoya Affect, for providing invaluable expert guidance and developing this blueprint.

We also thank our partners who provided thoughtful feedback and insights on the policy recommendations of this blueprint.

Finally, we thank the following members of the Immigrants Rising team for their thoughtful content development, copyediting, design, and publication of this blueprint: Iliana Perez, Daniela Rodriguez, Keziah Aurin, Renata McElvany, and Grace Yeo.

Immigrants Rising Board of Directors

Nicole Anand (Chair)

Dr. Felecia Russell (Vice-Chair)

Hans Miguel Esguerra (Treasurer)

Yongbin Chang (Secretary)

Abdi Soltani

Dr. Angela Chen

Areli Hernandez

Dr. Carrie Evans (Co-Founder of Immigrants Rising)

Lupe Gallegos-Diaz

Valeria Avila

Dr. William Perez

Immigrants Rising team at a brainstorming session.

Return to Table of Contents

Immigrants Rising team poses with Rise & Thrive Pitch Competition contestants and judges.

For more information, visit immigrantsrising.org.

For inquiries regarding Immigrants Rising's **California Blueprint for Immigrant Socioeconomic Prosperity**, please contact us at info@immigrantsrising.org.

Instagram: @immigrantsrising

LinkedIn: linkedin.com/company/immigrants-rising

Facebook: facebook.com/immigrantsrising

IMMIGRANTS RISING
TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH EDUCATION