



## NYIC 2016 New York City Policy & Budget Priorities

### Engaging Immigrant New Yorkers

#### Recommendation

Modernize New York City's electoral and voter registration processes to promote inclusive civic engagement.

- **Empower all New Yorkers in the Electoral Process: Municipal Resident Voting.** The NYC City Council should support the enfranchisement of all New York City residents for city-level elections. By passing legislation for Municipal Resident Voting, the City Council will guarantee the ability of those who live and work in NYC to have a share in important decisions necessary to ensure a better quality of life for themselves and their families.
- **Student Voter Registration Day (SVRD) at \$1MM.** The City Council should increase funding for Student Voter Registration which will support the expansion of the program to multiple days and increase the number of high schools who participate. By funding SVRD, high school seniors in all City Council districts will be registered to vote, pledge to be civically engaged, and be given resources on immigration and college support.
- **Expand Participatory Budgeting (PB) to every City Council district to engage immigrant communities, and extend PB beyond capital budgets to include expense funding.** We plan to work with the New York City Council to increase immigrant participation in "participatory budgeting." The Council should provide \$40,000 per district to help engage communities that have traditionally been excluded from local decision-making because they lack English proficiency or immigration status, or are culturally unfamiliar with civic processes.
- **Revamp the Board of Elections through a package of reforms to enfranchise immigrant voters.** Reform the Board of Elections to efficiently improve programming and procedures, implementing a cultural competency curriculum, increase language access, and updated training program for election site workers. We also seek resources to provide community based oversight and analysis of poll sites so that community-based organizations can monitor service provision.

#### History

- **2014:** Participatory Budgeting programs in 24 City Council districts draw more than 54,000 participants.
- **2015:** NYC City Council invests \$350,000 to support Student Voter Registration Day in the FY 2016 budget.

#### Community Need and Background

New York City is the second-largest home to New Americans in the nation. With nearly 40% of New York City's residents being foreign-born and over 60% speaking a language other than English at home, we have the opportunity to fully engage newcomers from all over the globe in our civic and electoral processes. New York City houses over 40% of all voters in the state, but with the continued lack of language accessibility, understanding of the electoral process, and issues at the polls, New York City's new Americans continue to be civically disengaged and, in turn, unable to fully integrate into the fabric of our city. Almost every election year in recent history has had dwindling voter turnout rates; the decision of selecting representation is left in the hands of a few rather than the many. When New American voters do head to the polls, they are inhibited by poorly-trained poll workers, difficulty navigating the voting process, and still-extant language barriers. While New York City has been a leader in engaging its residents civically, we must do more to engage our newest New York City residents and ensure the creation and expansion of programs to holistically integrate all residents to self-determination. Engaging New American and Immigrant New York City residents in the electoral process offers a unique opportunity to fundamentally change the dynamics of civic engagement in New York City.

#### Opportunity

- The expansion of municipal voting will allow over 1.3 million New Yorkers to participate in the electoral process, allowing all New York City residents the right to vote would truly be illustrate "taxation with representation".
- SVRD will see even greater success with program growth made possible by increased funding.
- Providing community-based organizations \$40,000 in funding support to actively engage residents in the PB process will expand the reach and transformation of communities across New York City.
- Increasing language access and cultural competency at the poll will provide a more engaged and powerful electorate.