

STRATEGIC PLAN 2023 - 2026



**IMMIGRANT LAW CENTER**  
— of MINNESOTA —

*Supporting families and strengthening communities since 1996*

## Mission

Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota (ILCM) enhances opportunities for immigrants and refugees through legal representation for low-income individuals, and through education and advocacy with diverse communities.

## Vision

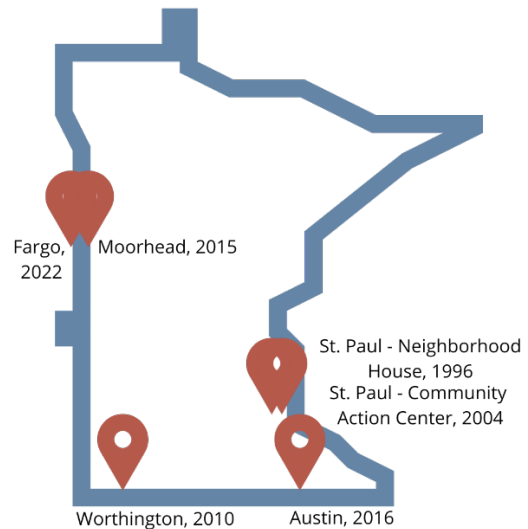
ILCM's values are grounded in respect for and partnership with our immigrant and refugee clients.

- We bring our full legal passion, dedicated attention and highest quality service to our low-income immigrant and refugee clients and their families;
- We value relationships with the communities we serve and seek to express their full potential and contributions through our work together;
- We work with excellence and integrity;
- We believe in taking action to make immigration systems work for all.

## History

The Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota (ILCM) was founded in 1976 as Oficina Legal, a program of Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services (SMRLS). Oficina Legal established itself as a separate 501(c)(3) nonprofit in 1996 due to federal restrictions on legal aid offices. The agency was later renamed to reflect the increasing diversity of the immigrant population it served. Over the last two decades, ILCM has established itself as Minnesota's premier provider of comprehensive immigration legal services to low-income clients of all nationalities.

In 1996, ILCM opened its first office in the Neighborhood House in St. Paul. In 2004, we moved our main office to the Community Action Partnership building in St. Paul Midway. In 2010, we opened an office in Worthington. In 2015, we expanded our services to Moorhead, and in 2016, we opened our office in Austin. In 2022, ILCM opened an office in Fargo to specifically serve refugees, asylees, Ukrainian parolees, and Afghan Special Immigrant Visa holders.



## Impact & Growth

- In 2006 ILCM provided legal services in 1,266 cases. Since then, our caseload has grown. In 2023 ILCM worked on 2,353 unique cases impacting approximately 7,059 individuals.
- Since 1996, ILCM has provided legal services in approximately 45,000 cases, impacting over 135,000 individuals.
- Over 25+ years ILCM has served clients coming from 163 countries, with 39% from Mexico, 26% from countries in Central and South America, 17% from countries in Asia, 16% from countries in Africa, and the remainder from countries in Europe, Oceania, and North America.

## The Future We Envision

In 2026, ILCM will celebrate its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. At that time, we look forward to coming together to celebrate ILCM's leadership and partnership as a catalyst for the approximately 100,000 low-income immigrants and refugees living in Minnesota today to finally be traveling on the pathway to citizenship,

stability, and prosperity. This strategic plan provides a blueprint for ILCM to achieve the future we want: one in which our country has an immigration system that works for all and in which we support those who finally have access to that system.

## Strategic Planning

### Context

Over the last decade, policies and rhetoric regarding immigrants and refugees have shifted at an unprecedented rate. These rapid shifts are likely to continue. In the past few years, the COVID-19 pandemic, our nation's racial reckoning, a new economic reality have forever changed and will continue to change our societal landscape. Against this backdrop, thoughtful, sustainable organizational growth is more important than ever.

We know the pathway to citizenship is broken and nearly impossible to navigate. For 27 years, ILCM has been representing and advocating for immigrants as they navigate the long, complicated process of becoming a U.S. citizen. The needs of our clients are ever-changing and the unmet need across Minnesota continues to rise as foreign-born populations make up more of our communities.

Citizenship cases that may have taken less than 1 year to complete previously are now taking 1-2 years to process. On the other end of the spectrum, deportation cases that once took a few years to complete now languish for 5-7 years. These delays were compounded because key offices and agencies shut down during the early days of the pandemic and now have too few workers. These delays impact virtually all our clients and our staff and volunteers, who are limited in their ability to take on new cases because they cannot close older cases. Additionally, with population growth in the state being driven by immigrant populations, our partners across the state report there is a significant unmet need for immigration legal services to obtain, maintain, and improve lawful status—the key to unlocking security, opportunity, and prosperity for any immigrant or refugee.

Yet, by fulfilling our mission of providing free, comprehensive legal services for immigrants and refugees, we also experience moments of hope every day. Behind every frustrating circumstance, there is an immigrant or refugee in our community telling us:

*“Having an attorney translate all the information and talk me through my immigration case was really helpful.”*

*“There is community everywhere.”*

*“Thanks to the service and support of ILCM and I look forward to a more secure future.”*

*“Minnesota is my home.”*

## Process

### Strategic Planning Committee

ILCM's strategic planning committee was composed of the leadership team, a diverse cross-section of staff, and the Board of Directors. The committee served as a sounding board and provided critical feedback.

### Needs Assessment

Because of the dearth of immigration legal services available in the Dakotas and the consistent requests from those states for ILCM's assistance, ILCM considered Minnesota and the Dakotas in its needs assessment.

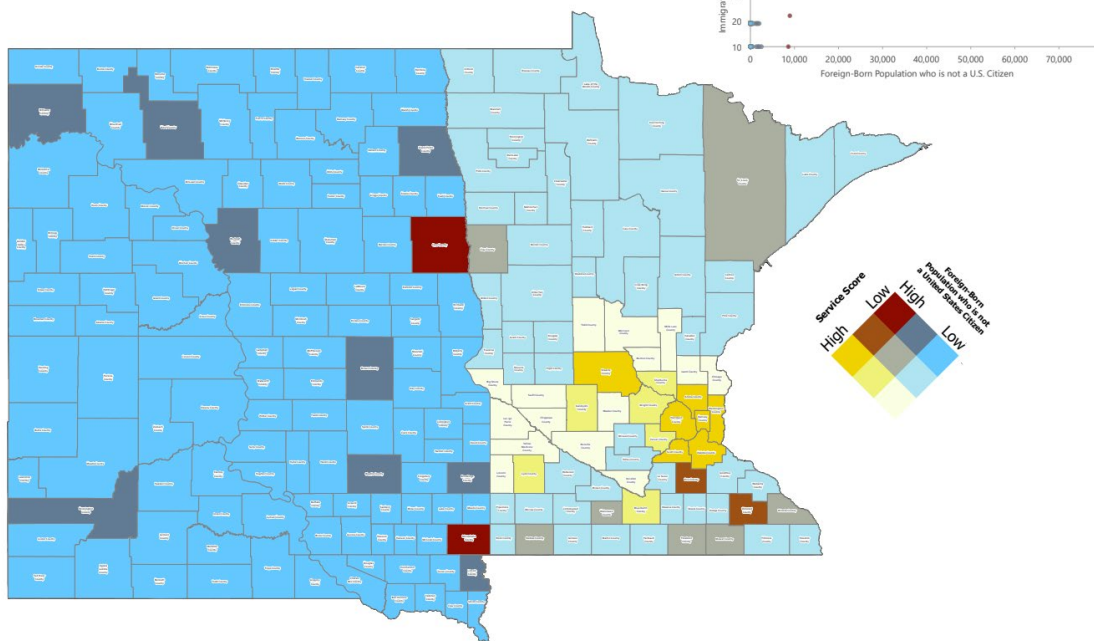
First, ILCM worked with a graduate student at the University of Minnesota to administer a needs assessment survey to current and former ILCM clients, stakeholders, and staff regarding their legal needs. The highest priority unmet immigration legal needs identified were:

- Deportation defense
- Family-based visa petitions
- Special Immigrant Juvenile (SIJ) visas for unaccompanied minors
- Citizenship

Second, ILCM worked with two recent college graduates to map the need for immigration legal services in Minnesota and the Dakotas. We homed in on highlighting potentially underserved counties by comparing the prevalence of free or low-cost immigration legal services to the foreign-born population who are not U.S. Citizens.

### Highlighting Potentially Underserved Counties in MN, ND, and SD

Comparing Immigration Service Prevalence and Reach with Foreign-Born Population who is not a U.S. Citizen



## **Key Questions**

The strategic planning committee considered four key questions during the strategic planning process:

- Where should we work?
- What work should we do?
- How should we do our work?
- How do we fund our work?

For each of the key questions, the strategic planning committee reviewed a comprehensive background paper prepared by ILCM staff that synthesized data from ILCM and civil legal services organizations and nonprofits in Minnesota, the Dakotas, and nationally. The strategic planning committee also reviewed the results of a Racial Equity Assessment of Minnesota Civil Legal Aid providers—including ILCM—commissioned by the state Legal Services Advisory Committee and conducted by the Shriver Center on Poverty Law.

## **Deliberation**

The strategic planning committee met twice in 2022 for two deliberative sessions. Based on these discussions, the ILCM leadership team worked with the executive committee of the board to finalize a draft of the strategic plan, which was then discussed by the full board and staff before final adoption on March 15, 2023 and March 17, 2023 respectively.

Given the impact of changes in both local and federal elections, ILCM will review this strategic plan after the 2024 United States presidential election results are known.

# STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-2026

## EXPAND IMPACT TO MEET UNMET, EMERGENT, AND RISING NEEDS

Objectives	Actions and Impact Measures
<p>Increase services in (1) geographic areas with highest concentration of immigrants and refugees and lowest availability of free legal services; (2) substantive areas with the highest need, lowest availability of services, and strongest expertise; and (3) racial and ethnic communities where ILCM’s service rates have lagged behind the percentage of low-income immigrants and refugees in those communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase service-delivery in Olmsted, Rice, Nobles, and Watonwan Counties and underserved metropolitan counties through focused remote and in-person outreach and representation</li> <li>• Strengthen capacity of newly-opened North Dakota office and assess feasibility of South Dakota expansion</li> <li>• Increase capacity to provide deportation defense, Special Immigrant Juvenile (SIJ), citizenship, and family-based visa petitions services</li> <li>• Conduct baseline demographic breakdown of Minnesota and Dakotas immigrant and refugee communities and ILCM caseload by case type, location, and demographic breakdown</li> <li>• Develop and execute plan for improving service rates in communities where ILCM is not serving the community at the expected rate</li> </ul>
<p>Increase annual naturalization applications filed by 20% from 2022 to 2026 so a larger number of immigrants and refugees can naturalize and vote by increasing staffing capacity and systems improvement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase naturalization outreach and representation in areas of state with largest numbers of low-income lawful permanent residents eligible for naturalization</li> <li>• Improve outreach, referral, and service delivery systems by leveraging technology and optimizing work and volunteer assignments to increase capacity, including through targeted remote and in-person clinics</li> </ul>
<p>Increase annual applications filed for temporary and permanent lawful status by 20% from 2022 to 2026 to allow more immigrants and refugees to avoid deportation, obtain temporary status, or ultimately, a pathway to citizenship by increasing staffing capacity and systems improvement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase and strengthen strategic partnerships whose client communities are most likely eligible for ILCM’s immigration services</li> <li>• Improve outreach, referral, and service delivery systems by leveraging technology and optimizing work and volunteer, including through targeted remote and in-person clinics assignments to increase capacity</li> </ul>

**ENHANCE OUR DEMOCRACY AND INCREASE OPPORTUNITY IN PARTNERSHIP WITH COMMUNITY**

Objectives	Actions and Impact Measures
<p>In collaboration with community partners, advocate for policy changes to narrow the gap between the rights of citizens and noncitizens in Minnesota and act as a catalyst for comprehensive immigration reform to provide a pathway to citizenship for 90,000 undocumented Minnesotans and to create a streamlined pathway to citizenship for the tens of thousands of documented Minnesotans</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen relationships with immigrant-led organizations through ILCM advocacy staffing, develop systems for regular feedback and collaboration, and support ILCM advocates in community lawyering efforts</li> <li>• Advocate for policies supporting immigrants and refugees at the state and local level, including serving as a technical expert for the immigrant community and policy makers, educating and engaging the broader community in advocacy efforts, conducting outreach about new policies, and supporting implementation efforts</li> <li>• Draw on state and local advocacy work to develop and execute on a “Minnesota model” for comprehensive immigration reform</li> </ul>
<p>Increase awareness and engagement of general public on contributions and needs of immigrants and refugees through earned media and communications campaigns</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Galvanize an increased number of advocates and supporters in our communities through marketing, educational, and fundraising opportunities</li> <li>• On a quarterly basis, prepare and disseminate an ILCM case or project feature highlighting a hidden contribution or need of immigrant and refugee communities</li> <li>• Conduct media training to increase engagement of staff at all levels in communications and media opportunities</li> <li>• Strengthen relationships with mainstream media outlets, particularly in Greater Minnesota and North Dakota, to increase earned media coverage in those areas</li> </ul>
<p>Increase engagement of clients, former clients, and community, business and foundation stakeholders in advocacy for welcoming policies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct annual outreach and training to clients and former clients regarding advocacy issues and engaging in advocacy</li> <li>• For each policy proposal on ILCM’s public policy agenda, identify at least two clients or former client to speak in support, one from the metro counties and one from Greater Minnesota</li> <li>• Conduct annual event for corporate and foundation stakeholders and policymakers regarding the changing face of immigrants and refugees in Minnesota, their contributions and their needs</li> <li>• Increase representation of corporate and foundation stakeholders on ILCM’s public policy committee to increase engagement of those groups in advocating for welcoming policies</li> </ul>



## BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE & CULTIVATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF ADVOCATES

Objectives	Actions and Impact Measures
<p>Create a cadre of lifelong immigrant justice advocates by cultivating a recruiting pipeline and ongoing engagement of racially and linguistically diverse staff and volunteers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create workforce development program by partnering with paid internship programs and investments in accredited representatives, legal assistants, and administrative staff</li> <li>• Collaborate with law firms and corporate legal departments on pipeline programs to expose racially- and linguistically-diverse high school, college, and law students to legal opportunities from working at ILCM to working in the private sector and maintaining a pro bono practice</li> <li>• Develop a long-term recruitment, advancement, retention, and compensation plan for staff centered on commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion</li> </ul>
<p>Improve case management, administrative and technological systems to increase efficiency and engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retain a legal operations expert to identify and implement systems improvements</li> <li>• Update case management manual, implement initial and ongoing training and accountability measures for staff and volunteers, and create system for continuing improvement</li> <li>• Better leverage existing technology resources (e.g. LegalServer) and develop and implement plan for replacing and/or streamlining redundant or inefficient systems (e.g. timekeeping in Paychex and LegalServer, Divvy instead of current expense authorization/reimbursement system, Intacct for improved financial program management)</li> <li>• Solicit input and identify best practices for remote service delivery from staff and partner agencies and codify and document key lessons in agency-wide practices and procedures</li> </ul>
<p>Optimize staff and volunteer task assignments to maximize impact and engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retain a legal operations expert to support the legal team in examining and changing legal work processes</li> <li>• Update job descriptions and compensation in light of changes to work process and work distribution</li> <li>• Provide training to leadership team and supervisors in leading and managing change</li> </ul>
<p>Increase revenue across diverse sources and grow the donor base</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch 3-to-5-year comprehensive campaign to support organizational growth</li> <li>• Invest in acquisition and renewal strategies to build grassroots base of donors</li> <li>• Increase Development capacity to meet growing revenue needs</li> </ul>
<p>Advance justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout all ILCM touchpoints.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work in partnership with community-based organizations to advocate for policy changes aligned to community priorities and in a collaborative process;</li> <li>• Train staff and board members to increase understanding of and engagement in racial justice work, including evaluating and adjusting what we do and how we work through a race equity lens;</li> <li>• Increase recruitment and retention of staff of color, particularly members of communities we serve, by improving trainings, enhancing engagement, and increasing wages across the organization</li> </ul>