

**A FORMATIVE EVALUATION OF A SOCIAL INTEGRATION PROGRAM FOR
NEWLY ARRIVED IMMIGRANTS IN NEW YORK CITY**

by

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Abstract

This formative evaluation examined the development of a Social Integration (SI) program aimed at supporting newly arrived immigrants in New York City during their first year of residency. Guided by sociocultural theory, the study examined how cultural tools, language, and community interaction shape immigrant adaptation in a new social context. The evaluation addressed the following project questions: (1) How effectively could a social integration program be designed and implemented for newly arrived immigrants? (2) What core components would best support their integration? (3) What did stakeholders identify as essential to the program's success? (4) What structure—such as format and duration—would be most appropriate? (5) What challenges could arise during program implementation? Using a qualitative research design, the study included semi-structured interviews with twelve subject-matter experts (SMEs)—educators, social workers, legal advocates, and program managers with extensive experience working with immigrant communities. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes and actionable recommendations. Eight major themes emerged: (1) social integration and cultural adaptation, (2) language barriers and acquisition, (3) program structure and delivery format, (4) employment readiness and skill development, (5) challenges in program implementation, (6) psychosocial and mental health needs, (7) funding and sustainability, and (8) recruitment and stakeholder engagement. Key recommendations included offering hybrid instruction models, small group learning, trauma-informed services, practical language training, and civic education. Stakeholders also advocated for comprehensive employment preparation, mental health support, and wraparound services. A mixed funding strategy—comprising public, private, and sliding-scale participant contributions—was proposed to ensure long-term sustainability and accessibility. This evaluation contributes to the field of Human Services by presenting a replicable, evidence-informed social intervention (SI) program model aligned with

the values of social justice, empowerment, and inclusion. It addresses critical service gaps using a sociocultural theoretical foundation, emphasizing that learning and integration are socially mediated. Future research should include longitudinal evaluations of immigrant outcomes and investigate the role of digital access and informal support networks in enhancing integration.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to those who stood beside me with unwavering support, love, and encouragement throughout this journey.

To my beloved wife, *Soledad Brutus*, whose steadfast presence, patience, and strength have been my most significant pillars. You are my anchor and my inspiration. Thank you for being my partner, my confidante, and my source of endless motivation.

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Table of Content

Acknowledgments	iv
SECTION 1. PROJECT DESCRIPTION	1
Overview of the Project.....	1
Problem Statement and Purpose	2
Theoretical Framework.....	5
Project Context	9
Alignment of the Project with the Literature and Discipline.....	30
SECTION 2. PROCESS	32
Project Questions.....	32
Project Design/Method	33
Role of the Researcher.....	40
Project Study Protocol.....	42
<i>Professional Backgrounds of Interview Participants</i>	47
Data Analysis.....	51
SECTION 3. FINDINGS AND APPLICATION	56
Relevant Outcomes and Findings	56
<i>Dissemination and Use of Findings</i>	56
<i>Comparative Analysis with Existing Literature</i>	57
<i>Unexpected or Contradictory Results</i>	57
<i>Theme 1: Social Integration for Newly Arrived Immigrants</i>	60

<i>Theme 2. Language Barriers and Communication Challenges</i>	60
<i>Theme 3. Program Structure and Delivery Format</i>	61
<i>Theme 4. Employment and Workforce Readiness</i>	61
<i>Theme 5. Challenges in Program Implementation</i>	62
<i>Theme 6. Psychosocial and Mental Health Needs</i>	62
<i>Theme 7. Funding and Program Sustainability</i>	63
<i>Thematic Analysis for the SI Program</i>	65
Implications for Policy, Practice, and Future Research	66
Application and Benefits	68
Application in Broader Contexts	68
Contributions to Knowledge and Practice	69
Implications	71
Recommendations for Policy	71
Study Limitations	78
<i>Unanswered or Partially Answered Research Questions</i>	80
Future Research Directions	81
Conclusion	84
REFERENCES	86
APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND QUESTIONS	95
APPENDIX B. THEMATIC ANALYSIS DATA	97

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Stakeholder Roles and Responsibilities.....	38
Table 2. Professional Backgrounds of Interview Participants.....	47
Table 3. Theme-Participant Summary Matrix.....	55
Table 4. Key Themes and Project Questions Addressed by Theme.....	58
Table 5. Visual Depiction of Outcomes and Findings (Themes.....	59
Table 6. Thematic Analysis for the SI Program.....	65
Table 7. Policy Recommendations.....	72
Table 8. Recommendations for Practice	76

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Thematic Map of Key Themes in SI Program Development.....	54
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SECTION 1. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Overview of the Project

The purpose of this formative evaluation was to design a Social Integration (SI) program tailored to support newly arrived immigrants in New York City. Immigrants often face significant obstacles during their initial resettlement period, including language barriers, limited access to resources, and a lack of understanding of local systems (Ager & Strang, 2008). These challenges hinder successful integration and place immigrants at risk of social isolation. By addressing these barriers early, the SI program aims to facilitate a smoother transition into the community and promote long-term self-sufficiency.

Social integration efforts are particularly critical in New York City, which hosts one of the largest and most diverse immigrant populations in the United States. Research highlights the significance of early intervention and culturally responsive programming in fostering community cohesion and mitigating disparities (Bloemraad, 2006; Portes & Rumbaut, 2014). Despite this need, existing services often focus on basic needs, leaving a gap in structured programming that supports cultural adaptation and civic engagement. This evaluation sought to fill that gap by proposing a program grounded in both theory and practitioner insight.

The SI program was developed using a sociocultural theoretical framework, particularly Vygotsky's (1978) emphasis on learning through social interaction within cultural contexts. This framework guided the inclusion of three core components: cultural orientation, community mapping, and civics education. These components were selected to promote knowledge transfer, skill development, and greater engagement with local institutions. By empowering immigrants to participate in their new environment actively, the program fosters autonomy and social connectedness.

To evaluate the feasibility and relevance of the program, qualitative data were collected through interviews with Professional Subject Matter Experts (PSMEs), including social workers, educators, and community leaders. These interviews explored key questions related to program design, stakeholder expectations, and potential barriers to implementation. Findings revealed strong support for the program's objectives, particularly the emphasis on community-based learning and structured support during the first year of resettlement.

Ultimately, this evaluation contributes to the field of human services by promoting a model that reflects core values, including inclusion, equity, and self-determination. The insights gained through this formative evaluation will inform the future development of responsive integration programs tailored to the needs of immigrant communities. Moving forward, this work sets the stage for pilot testing and broader implementation in collaboration with local agencies and community stakeholders.

Problem Statement and Purpose

Newly arrived immigrants in New York City face considerable challenges to social integration due to entrenched systemic barriers, including limited access to essential services, fragmented support structures, and the absence of well-coordinated programs tailored to their needs for early adaptation and long-term development.

Despite the city's longstanding identity as a gateway for immigrants, recent assessments conducted by the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD, 2016, 2022) confirm a lack of comprehensive and structured Social Integration (SI) programming explicitly aimed at newcomers in their first year. AbuJarour (2022) further underscores that immigrants who arrive in New York often struggle to navigate key systems—such as healthcare, employment, housing, and education—without targeted assistance. These challenges are compounded by language barriers, unfamiliarity with local institutions, and limited social capital.

Research consistently supports the effectiveness of programs that offer structured support through civic education, cultural orientation, mentorship, and workforce development (Hanemann & Robinson, 2022; Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019). Without such initiatives, immigrants are more likely to experience prolonged acculturative stress, social isolation, and economic marginalization (Kang et al., 2020; Lou & Noels, 2020).

The lack of an integrated social integration infrastructure constitutes a significant problem in urban centers like New York City, where the immigrant population is diverse and rapidly growing. Fragmentation of services and inadequate cultural responsiveness among providers create persistent disparities in immigrants' access to basic services (Barker, 2021). The inability to receive timely and appropriate support undermines not only immigrants' capacity to achieve self-sufficiency but also the broader goals of social cohesion and economic inclusion within the city.

Moreover, uncoordinated and reactive service models fail to address the complex, multi-layered realities faced by immigrants during the first year of settlement—a period recognized by integration scholars as crucial for long-term social mobility and community engagement (Choi et al., 2021; Macaluso, 2022). Entigar (2021) notes that while many organizations offer targeted services, the absence of a citywide SI framework leaves immigrants dependent on inconsistent supports that do not adequately consider the intersectional needs of gender, language, legal status, or trauma exposure.

These systemic barriers create a compelling need for a comprehensive, structured, and culturally responsive SI program that supports newly arrived immigrants during their initial year of residency in New York City. A coordinated and research-informed program could significantly

improve integration outcomes by enabling immigrants to access services, build supportive networks, and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

The purpose of this formative evaluation was to design a structured Social Integration (SI) program specifically tailored to meet the unique needs of newly arrived immigrants in New York City during their first year of residency.

The evaluation drew from empirical research, practitioner reports, and sociocultural theory to inform the development of a multi-component SI program. The proposed model incorporates civic education, community mapping, English language acquisition, employment readiness workshops, and psychosocial support services—components repeatedly highlighted in the literature as essential for effective integration (English & Mayo, 2019; Graauw, 2020; Peri, 2016).

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory provides the conceptual foundation for the program, emphasizing the critical role of social interaction and culturally mediated learning in human development. Chirkov (2023) extends this theory by stressing the importance of community-based environments that facilitate adaptation through peer engagement, cultural bridging, and participatory learning. These theoretical perspectives align with findings from Hanemann and Robinson (2022), who emphasize the importance of mentorship-based models that promote confidence, community trust, and navigational competence.

By focusing on the critical first year of residency, the proposed SI program aims to intervene at a pivotal time in the immigrant settlement process. Early, structured support is essential for minimizing disorientation, building resilience, and accelerating pathways to independence. The program's comprehensive structure allows for adaptation to the varied needs

of different immigrant groups while maintaining a coherent service delivery model that can be implemented citywide.

The use of hybrid learning models (in-person and online), culturally tailored materials, and multilingual service delivery increases accessibility and inclusivity—particularly important in a context as linguistically and ethnically diverse as New York City. Furthermore, the inclusion of peer mentoring, trauma-informed counseling, and job readiness components ensures that the program addresses not only functional integration but also emotional well-being and long-term empowerment (AbuJarour, 2022; Choi et al., 2021).

This evaluation contributes to the field of Human Services by presenting a replicable and evidence-based social intervention (SI) model that embodies the profession's core values of social justice, equity, and inclusivity. The program design reflects an intentional, interdisciplinary approach that supports systemic change and community cohesion. As such, the evaluation serves as both a blueprint and a call to action for municipalities seeking to strengthen their immigrant integration infrastructure.

Theoretical Framework

The design and evaluation of the proposed SI program are grounded in sociocultural theory, initially developed by Lev Vygotsky (1978). This theory posits that human learning and development occur within social contexts and are shaped by interactions with others and the use of culturally constructed tools. Learning, from this perspective, is not simply an internal, individual process but rather a socially mediated activity that occurs through engagement with others in culturally meaningful ways (Chirkov, 2023). In the context of immigrant integration, sociocultural theory provides a valuable framework for understanding how individuals adjust to new environments and cultures while navigating both opportunities and systemic barriers.

According to Vygotsky (1978), development is inherently tied to the zone of proximal development (ZPD)—the distance between what a learner can do independently and what they can accomplish with guidance from more knowledgeable others. This concept has been widely applied in the design of educational and social programs, particularly those involving marginalized or transitioning populations. Within the SI program, this principle informs the structure of interventions that prioritize guided learning, peer support, and contextualized engagement over didactic, one-size-fits-all instruction.

Sociocultural theory further emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between the individual and the environment. For immigrants, integration is not merely a process of personal adaptation but rather a dynamic negotiation involving both the newcomers and the host community. Ager and Strang (2008) argue that integration is a multidimensional process encompassing legal rights, cultural knowledge, language acquisition, and social bonds. The environment—including policies, social norms, and community attitudes—plays a crucial role in shaping the experiences of immigrants. Thus, sociocultural theory urges human services practitioners to view integration as a co-constructed and interactive process (Bloemraad, 2006; Hanemann & Robinson, 2022).

This framework informed the SI program's deliberate inclusion of interactive learning modalities and community-based engagement strategies. Program modules such as community mapping, participatory civic education, and collaborative workshops were designed to leverage real-world experiences as platforms for learning. These approaches align with the notion that knowledge is constructed through participation in meaningful social practices (Macaluso, 2022). For instance, immigrants in the SI program are not passive recipients of information; rather, they

are invited to co-create solutions, share cultural insights, and actively contribute to the program's evolution.

A key element of sociocultural theory—language as a mediating tool—is particularly relevant in the context of immigrant integration. Language is not only a means of communication but also a critical medium for thought, identity formation, and social participation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). Accordingly, the SI program incorporates targeted English language instruction that is contextually relevant and embedded within everyday life scenarios. Rather than focusing solely on grammar and vocabulary, language instruction within the program is designed to help immigrants navigate employment, health care, education, and civic systems. This strategy reflects the understanding that language acquisition is a complex and multifaceted process involving both cognitive and social aspects that shape how individuals interact with and interpret their new cultural environment (Lee et al., 2020; Lou & Noels, 2020).

Moreover, sociocultural theory underscores the importance of cultural tools and shared meaning-making in the learning process. For immigrants, adaptation involves more than learning a new language or finding employment—it also requires making sense of unfamiliar cultural norms, values, and institutional structures. The SI program addresses this need through cultural competency workshops, peer mentoring systems, and storytelling initiatives that allow immigrants to share and contextualize their lived experiences. These program components are based on the belief that integration is optimized when individuals can connect their personal histories with new cultural contexts in a meaningful way (Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019).

The framework also guides the program's broader orientation toward social justice and equity, aligning with the core values of the human services profession. English and Mayo (2019) assert that culturally responsive practices are essential in promoting the well-being and dignity of

marginalized groups. The SI program operationalizes these values through trauma-informed care, inclusive service delivery, and advocacy for the rights of immigrants. For instance, the integration of mental health referrals, community-based navigation services, and individualized support plans reflects a holistic, strengths-based approach that aligns with both sociocultural theory and best practices in human services (Barker, 2021; Doshi et al., 2020).

Qualitative data gathered during the formative evaluation phase further affirmed the relevance of the sociocultural framework. Interviews with subject-matter experts, including educators, social workers, and community organizers, revealed strong support for strategies that promote collaborative learning, community integration, and empowerment. Several themes that emerged from these interviews—such as the need for flexible scheduling, hybrid learning formats, and culturally relevant content—demonstrate the alignment between expert insights and the foundational principles of sociocultural theory (AbuJarour, 2022; Hanemann & Robinson, 2022). These findings highlight the theory's utility not only as a conceptual guide but also as a practical tool for identifying stakeholder-informed program components.

Another implication of sociocultural theory is its attention to the learner's agency within the broader sociopolitical context. Immigrants are not passive entities assimilating into a monolithic culture; rather, they are active agents negotiating meaning, forging identities, and reshaping their environments. The SI program supports this agency by encouraging participants to engage in local governance, volunteer work, and advocacy. Through civic engagement workshops and leadership development activities, immigrants are empowered to become active contributors to the host society rather than mere recipients of assistance.

Finally, by embedding the SI program within the sociocultural tradition, this project challenges conventional models of integration that rely heavily on unidirectional assimilation.

Instead, it embraces a bidirectional model of adaptation, wherein both immigrants and host communities evolve through sustained interaction and shared experiences (Bloemraad, 2006; Chirkov, 2023). This theoretical orientation recognizes diversity as a strength and prioritizes the creation of inclusive spaces where cultural exchange and mutual respect are not only possible but actively encouraged and fostered.

In summary, sociocultural theory provides a robust and multifaceted foundation for the design, implementation, and evaluation of the proposed SI program for newly arrived immigrants in New York City. It emphasizes social interaction, cultural mediation, and empowerment as essential mechanisms of learning and development. By grounding the SI program in this framework, the project promotes a model of integration that is participatory, equitable, and culturally responsive. Moreover, it positions immigrants as agents of change, capable of shaping their own integration experiences while contributing meaningfully to the communities they join. This alignment between theory and practice not only strengthens the program's relevance but also reinforces its commitment to advancing social justice within the broader field of human services.

Project Context

This evaluation examines the historical background and contemporary trends related to the social integration of newly arrived immigrants in New York City, situating the discussion within broader socio-political and economic frameworks. The historical background and current trends for this evaluation focusing on the social integration of newly arrived immigrants in New York City are outlined in the paragraphs that follow.

Project Context and Justification for the Study

The city of New York, with its longstanding identity as a gateway for global migration, continues to receive thousands of immigrants each year. Over 36% of New York City residents are foreign-born (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022), reflecting a rich tapestry of cultural diversity. However, the influx of newly arrived immigrants also presents substantial challenges for integration, particularly during their first year of settlement. While many community organizations and government agencies offer limited services, a significant gap remains in structured, comprehensive settlement integration (SI) programs tailored to meet the complex needs of newcomers. This project is situated within the field of human services and aims to fill that void by developing a formative evaluation of a practical SI program.

Broader Context and Relevance

Social integration has become a central focus in discussions of human services, immigration policy, and social equity. A growing body of literature identifies systemic barriers that hinder immigrant inclusion, including language proficiency deficits, limited knowledge of community resources, unemployment, cultural dissonance, and psychosocial stress (AbuJarour, 2022; Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019). In a city as dynamic and complex as New York, these challenges are amplified by the cost of living, dense population, and bureaucratic hurdles. While the city is known for its multicultural vibrancy, studies show that newly arrived immigrants often experience marginalization and isolation if adequate support systems are lacking (Kang et al., 2020).

The proposed SI program responds directly to these systemic challenges. Grounded in sociocultural theory, the program promotes a dual model of adaptation: helping immigrants learn to navigate their new environment while also engaging the host community in the process of

inclusive support. As such, this evaluation contributes to both practical program design and broader theoretical discussions on cultural integration, empowerment, and equity in human services.

Evidence of Nee: Needs Assessment and Gaps in Service Delivery

A preliminary needs assessment, informed by interviews with professionals in immigrant-serving organizations, revealed several recurring gaps:

- Limited access to structured English language instruction tailored to real-life contexts.
- Fragmented service delivery systems across city agencies and community organizations.
- Lack of job readiness and workforce integration programming.
- Absence of targeted mental health resources attuned to immigrant trauma and adaptation stress.

Additionally, the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) has published community needs assessments (2016, 2022) indicating persistent service gaps in civic education, legal literacy, and employment training among immigrant populations. These findings highlight the importance of a coordinated program that integrates these critical elements within a cohesive framework.

Descriptive Data and Social Implications

According to the NYC Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA, 2023), immigrants comprise more than 44% of the city's workforce and make significant contributions to the city's economic and social fabric. However, this contribution is often undercut by structural inequities. For instance, newly arrived immigrants are disproportionately represented in low-wage, unstable

employment sectors and frequently lack access to healthcare, housing assistance, and legal support (Macaluso, 2022; Peri, 2016). The lack of early intervention in their integration process often results in long-term disparities.

The consequences of failing to support social integration are not only individual but systemic. Poor integration outcomes lead to economic marginalization, intergenerational poverty, social disengagement, and increased strain on public service systems. In contrast, well-structured SI programs have been shown to increase civic participation, economic productivity, and community cohesion (Ager & Strang, 2008; English & Mayo, 2019). This project, therefore, aligns with both social justice imperatives and economic rationality.

Cost-Benefit Considerations

While the development and implementation of a social integration program entail initial costs, the long-term benefits far outweigh the investment. Research suggests that immigrants who receive early support in language acquisition, workforce preparation, and civic engagement are more likely to secure stable employment, require fewer public benefits, and contribute to tax revenues (Bloemraad, 2006; Peri, 2016). Moreover, reducing barriers to integration has been associated with improved mental health outcomes, lower rates of homelessness, and enhanced educational achievement for second-generation immigrants (Barker, 2021; Doshi et al., 2020).

In fiscal terms, an SI program can represent a cost-saving strategy for city and state governments, particularly when implemented through a mixed funding model that involves public, private, and philanthropic contributions. By equipping immigrants to become self-sufficient earlier in their settlement process, such programs mitigate the long-term social service burden and contribute to a more inclusive, resilient urban community.

This section situates the project within a broader socio-economic and disciplinary context, illustrating the urgent need for targeted social integration programs in immigrant-dense urban environments. Through a combination of needs assessment data, demographic analysis, and theoretical alignment with sociocultural principles, the project establishes a strong foundation for developing and evaluating an SI program for newly arrived immigrants in New York City. This initiative holds the potential to improve individual outcomes, strengthen community ties, and contribute to policy advancements in the human services field.

Historical Background and Current Trends

New York City has long stood at the forefront of global migration patterns, serving as a major port of entry and resettlement hub for generations of immigrants. With over 3.2 million foreign-born residents, immigrants currently account for more than 37% of the city's population (New York City Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs [MOIA], 2023). These figures underscore the city's unparalleled diversity but also point to the immense responsibility it bears in fostering inclusive and sustainable integration pathways. As immigrant demographics continue to diversify across national origin, education level, and immigration status, the need for structured, adaptive, and context-sensitive integration strategies has never been more urgent (Kang et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2020).

Historical Background

Historically, immigration to New York City has been shaped by geopolitical upheavals, colonial legacies, economic inequalities, and humanitarian crises. From the early 19th-century influx of Irish and Italian laborers to the more recent arrivals from Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa, successive waves of immigration have contributed to the city's socio-economic development (Foner, 2000). Despite this rich history, structured support for immigrant

integration has often lagged behind demographic shifts. While community-based organizations (CBOs) and informal networks have played a crucial role in addressing immediate settlement needs, municipal and state-led responses have often remained fragmented or reactive (Macaluso, 2022; Peri, 2016).

In the early 20th century, dominant models of assimilation demanded rapid acculturation, often framing cultural retention as a barrier to national unity. These models promoted unidirectional adaptation where immigrants were expected to conform to Anglo-American norms, frequently at the expense of their cultural identity (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014). Over time, this paradigm has been challenged by more inclusive frameworks that value biculturalism and mutual adaptation. The "integration" model, as described by Ager and Strang (2008), recognizes that successful settlement requires reciprocal engagement between immigrants and host societies, fostering both belonging and systemic transformation.

The evolution of immigrant services in New York City reflects broader national debates around inclusion, citizenship, and the role of government. For instance, following the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which eliminated racial quotas, New York saw a dramatic rise in non-European immigration. In response, the city began funding ESL programs, adult literacy initiatives, and community development grants aimed at improving immigrant outcomes. However, these efforts were often under-resourced and failed to account for intersectional vulnerabilities such as undocumented status, trauma, or linguistic isolation (Bloemraad, 2006; Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019).

Assessments conducted by the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD, 2016, 2022) continue to highlight service gaps across key domains, including employment, housing, legal aid, healthcare access, and civic participation. These

deficiencies are particularly acute for immigrants in their first year of arrival—a period often marked by heightened uncertainty, limited social capital, and bureaucratic inaccessibility (Hanemann & Robinson, 2022). Furthermore, evaluations from immigrant-serving nonprofits reveal that structural barriers such as credential non-recognition, restrictive immigration policies, and digital exclusion further compound these challenges (Doshi et al., 2020; Macaluso, 2022).

Current Trends in Immigrant Integration

In recent years, a notable paradigm shift has occurred in the design and delivery of immigrant integration programs. Rather than focusing solely on individual adaptation, contemporary models embrace a holistic, participatory approach that acknowledges the sociocultural, psychological, and systemic dimensions of integration. This aligns with the sociocultural theory framework guiding the present evaluation, which emphasizes that development and learning are mediated by cultural tools, community engagement, and reciprocal relationships (Chirkov, 2023; Vygotsky, 1978).

Key trends in New York City include the expansion of community-driven initiatives supported by cross-sectoral partnerships between government agencies, nonprofit organizations, faith-based groups, and academic institutions (English & Mayo, 2019). These collaborative frameworks promote sustainability and adaptability, ensuring that programs remain responsive to changing needs and demographics. For example, programs that combine ESL instruction with job training, digital literacy, and legal aid have demonstrated promising outcomes in enhancing immigrant self-sufficiency and civic engagement (AbuJarour, 2022; Lou & Noels, 2020).

Technology has also played a transformative role. The integration of hybrid service delivery models—such as virtual orientation sessions, mobile application access to services, and multilingual digital platforms—has broadened the reach and accessibility of support services.

This is particularly critical given the growing digital divide experienced by many low-income or older immigrants (Kang et al., 2020; MOIA, 2023).

Moreover, there is increasing policy momentum toward a rights-based approach that prioritizes social equity, dignity, and agency. This includes the establishment of municipal ID programs (e.g., IDNYC), the allocation of funds for immigration legal services, and the institutionalization of immigrant advisory councils to ensure community voice in policymaking (English & Mayo, 2019; MOIA, 2023). In 2021, New York City launched the Immigrant Health Initiative, aimed at increasing healthcare access regardless of status, reflecting broader efforts to institutionalize immigrant inclusion across sectors.

Nevertheless, serious gaps persist. Language barriers remain one of the most cited obstacles to integration, with limited access to high-quality, context-sensitive ESL programming. Economic integration remains a major hurdle, with many immigrants facing underemployment or labor exploitation despite having relevant qualifications (Macaluso, 2022; Peri, 2016). Additionally, mental health services remain scarce or culturally misaligned, leaving many immigrants without adequate psychosocial support during a critical period of transition (Lee et al., 2020).

Data from recent needs assessments in immigrant-dense neighborhoods further underscore these challenges. For instance, community surveys conducted in Queens and the Bronx revealed that nearly 60% of recent arrivals encountered difficulties accessing employment and healthcare services within their first 12 months (MOIA, 2023). Advocacy organizations such as Make the Road New York and the New York Immigration Coalition have called for integrated, place-based models that bring services directly into immigrant communities and

involve peer mentors, multilingual staff, and culturally tailored curricula (Hanemann & Robinson, 2022).

The Case for Structured Integration Programs

Given this landscape, the need for a structured, evidence-informed SI program becomes clear. Unlike fragmented or siloed interventions, a holistic SI program can address the multifaceted realities of immigrant life in New York City. This project's formative evaluation responds to these gaps by proposing a program that centers on early intervention, linguistic empowerment, community navigation, and civic education—all grounded in sociocultural theory and informed by stakeholder feedback.

Research shows that investments in integration yield measurable social returns. These include increased labor market participation, improved health outcomes, enhanced educational attainment for children, and greater social cohesion (Ager & Strang, 2008; Portes & Rumbaut, 2014). Additionally, municipalities with comprehensive integration policies experience lower levels of social unrest, higher voter participation, and stronger intergroup relations (Bloemraad, 2006).

This project acknowledges that integration is not a one-size-fits-all process but rather a co-constructed journey that requires responsive, inclusive, and adaptive interventions. By synthesizing insights from historical patterns, current trends, and emergent best practices, this section provides the empirical and theoretical foundation for the SI program's design and evaluation. It emphasizes the necessity of shifting from reactive service delivery models to proactive, equity-centered frameworks that not only meet immigrants' immediate needs but also promote long-term empowerment and community participation.

Synthesis of the Scholarly Literature

The scholarly literature reviewed for this formative evaluation explored the multifaceted challenges newly arrived immigrants encounter in New York City, highlighting the critical need for structured and culturally responsive SI programs. This synthesis provides a comprehensive understanding of immediate and long-term integration needs, advocating targeted interventions tailored to the diverse and continuously evolving immigrant demographics of New York City.

Immigrant integration is broadly conceptualized as the ongoing process through which immigrants adapt to and become fully integrated into the social fabric of their host communities. Historically recognized as a significant immigrant gateway, New York City's dynamic demographic shifts have profoundly influenced the development of local policies and community service strategies. Recent trends, characterized by increasing diversity among immigrant groups, underscore the importance of adaptive and inclusive SI programs designed to foster effective integration and sustainable community development.

The analysis emphasizes that structured SI programs are crucial during immigrants' initial year of settlement, addressing barriers such as language proficiency, economic integration, psychosocial stress, social adaptation difficulties, and cultural differences. Given New York City's unique and complex sociocultural landscape, effective interventions must specifically target these barriers to promote social justice, inclusivity, and equitable community participation (AbuJarour, 2022; Lee et al., 2020). Thus, this scholarly synthesis underscores the complexity of immigrant integration, highlighting both immediate and long-term challenges and reinforcing the essential role of comprehensive, structured programs tailored explicitly to meet the needs of dynamic immigrant populations in urban settings.

Challenges Faced by Newly Arrived Immigrants

Despite ongoing efforts, newly arrived immigrants continue to encounter numerous barriers to social integration, particularly in urban environments such as New York City. Among these challenges, language proficiency consistently emerges as a fundamental barrier significantly impacting immigrants' ability to secure stable employment, access education, healthcare, and essential public services, thereby negatively affecting their socio-economic prospects and overall quality of life (Kang et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2020; Lou & Noels, 2020). Effective language acquisition programs that incorporate practical, context-specific, and occupation-specific language skills, combined with structured mentorship and peer-support networks, are crucial for facilitating rapid language learning and enhancing confidence among immigrant participants (Kang et al., 2020; Lou & Noels, 2020).

Economic integration also remains a critical challenge. Immigrants frequently encounter significant obstacles, such as a lack of credential recognition and limited access to specialized job training, which can result in underemployment or unemployment despite possessing qualifications recognized in their countries of origin (Macaluso, 2022; Peri, 2016). To address these economic barriers, comprehensive workforce development initiatives are essential, including structured vocational training, career counseling, resume-building workshops, and robust networking opportunities. These initiatives should align immigrant skills with local labor market demands, fostering economic stability and upward socio-economic mobility (Hanemann & Robinson, 2022; Macaluso, 2022; Peri, 2016).

Psychosocial stress constitutes another substantial integration barrier, deeply rooted in displacement, social isolation, and acculturative pressures. Newly arrived immigrants often experience significant emotional and mental health challenges exacerbated by navigating unfamiliar cultural contexts and systemic barriers (AbuJarour, 2022; Barker, 2021). The

literature underscores the importance of culturally responsive mental health interventions and community-building activities, which significantly mitigate these psychosocial impacts, supporting overall well-being and successful integration (Barker, 2021; Doshi et al., 2020).

Programmatic Approaches to Social Integration

The reviewed literature identifies several programmatic best practices essential for designing and implementing effective SI programs for newly arrived immigrants. These best practices encompass civic education, flexible learning approaches, employment readiness, and holistic service provision—all critical components that collectively foster integration, empowerment, and long-term stability.

Civic education is consistently highlighted as a foundational element in SI programming, aimed at equipping immigrants with knowledge of legal rights, government structures, and pathways for civic participation. Studies indicate that civic education not only enhances awareness of legal and social systems but also fosters a sense of belonging, empowerment, and active community engagement (English & Mayo, 2019; Hanemann & Robinson, 2022). Programs that effectively incorporate civic learning create opportunities for immigrants to become involved in local decision-making processes and community initiatives, thus accelerating integration and social cohesion.

Given the diverse obligations of immigrant populations—such as irregular work hours and caregiving responsibilities—flexible educational formats are crucial. Hybrid learning models, which combine in-person instruction with online components, have been demonstrated to accommodate these needs effectively. The literature supports smaller class sizes and interactive, learner-centered teaching methods as particularly effective in boosting educational outcomes and participant retention (AbuJarour, 2022; Lee et al., 2020). These models are

especially beneficial in promoting sustained engagement and allowing learners to progress at their own pace within a supportive environment.

Workforce development is a central pillar of successful SI programs, addressing both immediate and long-term economic integration. Effective initiatives provide tailored job training, career counseling, resume-building workshops, and practical skill application. These components not only enhance employability but also contribute to financial independence and occupational resilience (Macaluso, 2022). By aligning immigrants' existing skills with local labor market demands, these programs enable upward economic mobility and reduce underemployment.

Comprehensive support systems embedded within SI programs are crucial for addressing the multifaceted challenges that immigrants face. Services such as healthcare access, housing assistance, and legal aid are vital in stabilizing immigrants' lives and facilitating deeper engagement in integration programs. The literature emphasizes that holistic models—those that provide wraparound support within a single, integrated framework—significantly increase retention, improve well-being, and promote long-term integration outcomes (Barker, 2021; Doshi et al., 2020). These models reflect an understanding that social integration is a complex, interdependent process requiring coordinated interventions across multiple domains.

Social Integration and Its Importance

Structured social integration (SI) programs play a critical role in enhancing immigrants' access to essential resources such as education, employment, healthcare, and housing. Empirical studies confirm that immigrants engaged in well-designed SI initiatives demonstrate significantly improved civic participation, heightened awareness of social justice issues, and expanded economic opportunities (English & Mayo, 2019; Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019). These

outcomes not only benefit individual immigrants but also contribute to broader societal development.

Central to effective SI programming are elements that foster community engagement, promote cultural competency, and provide multilingual support. Such features are proven to strengthen social cohesion by facilitating mutual understanding and collaboration between immigrant populations and host communities (Hanemann & Robinson, 2022). Programs that integrate these components create inclusive environments where immigrants feel empowered to participate fully in civic life.

The literature further underscores the importance of designing SI programs that address both immediate and long-term needs. Immediate support services—including English language acquisition, housing stability, access to healthcare, and employment assistance—are vital in the early stages of resettlement and integration. These foundational interventions help stabilize immigrants' lives and create pathways for initial participation in their new communities (Barker, 2021; Macaluso, 2022).

In contrast, long-term objectives such as fostering self-sufficiency, encouraging civic participation, and promoting cross-cultural understanding are essential for sustained integration. Programs that incorporate these goals are more likely to support immigrants in becoming active, self-reliant, and socially engaged members of society (Entigar, 2021; Macaluso, 2022). Research consistently advocates for comprehensive, community-based partnerships that coordinate service delivery and support across multiple domains, ensuring integration efforts are holistic, adaptive, and impactful over time.

Efforts and Gaps in Addressing Immigrant Needs

Despite the presence of various integration initiatives, significant service gaps persist in the consistent provision of comprehensive educational, employment, and social support services for immigrants. Reports from New York City's Neighborhood Advisory Board (NAB) and the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) highlight ongoing inadequacies in meeting immigrant needs, particularly in career advancement and access to quality educational opportunities. These agencies recommend continuous quality improvement in program delivery and greater collaboration among community stakeholders to address these shortfalls (Department of Youth and Community Development [DYCD], 2016, 2022). Scholars reinforce these findings, emphasizing that the lack of targeted and structured SI programs impedes immigrants' ability to navigate cultural and social challenges. This deficiency not only hinders individual well-being but also undermines broader community integration and social cohesion (Kang et al., 2020; Macaluso, 2022).

Theoretical Orientation and Program Framework

The proposed SI program is grounded in sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the foundational role of social interaction and community engagement in shaping individuals' cognitive, social, and behavioral development, particularly as they adapt to new cultural environments (Chirkov, 2023; Doshi et al., 2020). This theoretical perspective views integration as a reciprocal process whereby immigrants adapt to their host society while communities simultaneously establish supportive structures to facilitate inclusion (English & Mayo, 2019; Lee et al., 2020). Such reciprocity is crucial in fostering sustainable integration, civic engagement, and a sense of belonging. Drawing from these theoretical insights, the SI program prioritizes

civic engagement, community mapping, and language acquisition as key pillars of immigrant support and empowerment.

These core components align with empirical findings that identify education, language development, and community-based initiatives as central to successful immigrant integration (Barker, 2021; Lou & Noels, 2020). Additionally, the program responds to documented service gaps by providing structured, culturally responsive interventions designed to equip immigrants with the skills and knowledge needed to navigate social, educational, and professional environments effectively (Berker, 2021). By addressing both immediate adaptation challenges and long-term inclusion strategies, the program not only fosters individual resilience and capacity but also contributes to broader social cohesion and community development.

Methodological Approach

This formative evaluation employed a qualitative research design, utilizing in-depth interviews with subject-matter experts, including social workers, educators, and human services professionals. The objective was to gather informed perspectives on the structure, content, and implementation challenges of SI programs. These interviews provided valuable real-world insights that informed the adaptive design of the proposed SI initiative (Barker, 2021; Entigar, 2021). Thematic analysis was applied to the collected data, enabling the identification of recurring patterns, key themes, and essential components critical to the development of effective and sustainable integration programs (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of immigrants' needs and the systemic barriers that must be addressed to support successful integration.

The findings of this evaluation underscore the urgent need for comprehensive and culturally responsive SI programs tailored explicitly to newly arrived immigrants in metropolitan

areas such as New York City. Both the empirical data and the reviewed literature align with sociocultural frameworks that advocate for structured, context-sensitive interventions to address the complex realities of immigrant integration (Chirkov, 2023; Doshi et al., 2020; Lou & Noels, 2020). By systematically identifying and addressing service gaps, the proposed program aims to facilitate both immediate adaptation and long-term inclusion. By doing so, this project makes a meaningful contribution to the field of human services by promoting social justice, inclusivity, and community resilience among immigrant populations (English & Mayo, 2019; Macaluso, 2022).

Synthesis of the Practitioner Literature

The practitioner literature reviewed in this formative evaluation centers on the design, delivery, and implementation of an SI program tailored to newly arrived immigrants in New York City. The synthesis builds on emerging best practices and case studies in immigrant support, public service delivery, and urban integration frameworks, highlighting the practical challenges and innovations shaping real-world programmatic responses. Consistent across practitioner sources is the urgent call for structured, culturally competent interventions that address language acquisition, employment, civic education, and psychosocial well-being—especially during the first year of immigrants' arrival, a period widely recognized as critical for long-term integration outcomes (English & Mayo, 2019; Lee et al., 2020; NYC DYCD, 2022).

Recognizing the Integration Gap

The literature identifies a persistent gap in comprehensive, scalable integration programs across major urban centers, with particular concern for immigrants in cities like New York, where the population is diverse, but services are fragmented (Graauw, 2020; Peri, 2016). Governmental reports (NYC DYCD, 2016, 2022) and frontline service providers have flagged

the inadequacy of current program offerings in meeting the multidimensional needs of immigrants, especially those lacking English proficiency, work authorization, or legal literacy. Despite extensive community-based efforts, there remains no centralized or universally accessible framework that coordinates employment, health, legal, and education services with cultural acclimation and civic participation (Entigar, 2021; Macaluso, 2022). As a result, immigrants are frequently left to navigate a patchwork of services, often without clear guidance or continuity of care.

Language Acquisition and Communicative Competence

Language proficiency remains a fundamental pillar of integration, as cited in nearly all practitioner and scholarly evaluations (Batalova & Fix, 2015; Kang et al., 2020). In practice, however, ESL programming is often under-resourced and not tailored to occupational or everyday needs. Practitioners recommend contextualized English learning—focused on job interviews, healthcare navigation, and parent-teacher engagement—as more effective than traditional classroom instruction (Hanemann & Robinson, 2022; Lou & Noels, 2020). Programs combining formal ESL classes with mentorship or community language cafés report stronger learner engagement, improved retention, and greater confidence in daily interactions (AbuJarour, 2022; English & Mayo, 2019).

Furthermore, access to virtual platforms for language learning remains inequitable. The digital divide, especially for recent immigrants, limits the effectiveness of hybrid or online-only language programming (Barker, 2021; Center for Law and Social Policy [CLASP], 2021). As such, the practitioner literature emphasizes multimodal delivery models that incorporate in-person, print-based, and mobile-accessible materials to facilitate inclusive participation (Chirkov, 2023; Doshi et al., 2020).

Workforce Integration and Credentialing Barriers

Economic self-sufficiency is another cornerstone of successful integration. Yet, immigrant job seekers frequently encounter barriers such as the non-recognition of foreign credentials, a lack of U.S. work experience, and unfamiliarity with workplace norms (Macaluso, 2022; Peri, 2016). Practitioner interventions highlight the importance of integrated workforce development services that provide not only technical skills and job placement but also resume workshops, soft skills training, and rights education (CLASP, 2021; Migration Policy Institute, 2018).

Some innovative models include employer partnerships for paid internships or "bridge programs" that re-certify foreign professionals for U.S. job markets (New York Immigration Coalition, 2020). Additionally, wraparound services such as childcare, transportation vouchers, and translation support are identified as essential enablers of job participation, particularly for single-parent or refugee households (Hanemann & Robinson, 2022).

Civic Education and Legal Empowerment

Understanding local governance, civic responsibilities, and legal rights is essential for effective social participation. The practitioner literature recommends incorporating civic education into SI programs through interactive workshops, peer-led town halls, and collaborations with legal aid organizations (Entigar, 2021; NYC MOIA, 2019). Civic readiness modules have been found to improve immigrants' engagement in school boards, community boards, and housing councils—thus fostering both self-advocacy and community representation (English & Mayo, 2019; Graauw, 2020).

Importantly, legal empowerment also encompasses knowledge of immigration procedures, such as asylum applications, employment authorization, and eligibility for public

benefits (Doshi et al., 2020; IRC, 2023). Programs that demystify legal processes and offer direct referrals to immigration attorneys or pro bono clinics increase trust and reduce the risk of exploitation or misinformation (Center for Urban Future, 2021).

Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

The emotional toll of migration—displacement, trauma, and cultural isolation—calls for intentional psychosocial support within integration frameworks. Practitioners emphasize that mental health services must be culturally responsive, linguistically accessible, and integrated into broader programming rather than isolated (AbuJarour, 2022; Barker, 2021). Models integrating mental health check-ins, group therapy, or peer-support circles have shown success in reducing anxiety, depression, and acculturative stress (American Psychological Association, 2022; Doshi et al., 2020).

Additionally, faith-based organizations and ethnic community centers are increasingly recognized as critical partners in mental wellness, offering safe spaces that align with cultural beliefs and practices (CLASP, 2021; NYIC, 2020). Training frontline service workers in trauma-informed care also enhances program responsiveness and builds staff resilience (Hanemann & Robinson, 2022).

Program Structure, Delivery, and Accessibility

Designing an effective SI program requires flexibility in format and duration to accommodate the diverse schedules, literacy levels, and commitments of immigrant participants (Lou & Noels, 2020; NYC DYCD, 2022). Practitioner literature supports modular, cohort-based programming with clearly defined goals and progressive achievement benchmarks (Entigar, 2021; Kang et al., 2020). Sessions offered during evenings or weekends, along with childcare availability, are key to increasing participation.

Delivery should be hybrid, when possible, but must account for digital literacy and hardware access gaps (AbuJarour, 2022; Center for Urban Future, 2021). Community-based delivery sites such as public libraries, schools, and settlement houses are preferred over government buildings due to higher levels of perceived safety and trust (Graauw, 2020).

Sustainability and Funding Strategies

Sustainability is a recurring theme across practitioner sources, particularly given the inconsistent public funding (Macaluso, 2022; Migration Policy Institute, 2018). The most durable programs employ diversified funding strategies, including municipal grants, philanthropic foundations, and modest participant contributions (English & Mayo, 2019; Hanemann & Robinson, 2022). Moreover, practitioners advise building evaluation frameworks into program design to demonstrate impact and attract long-term investment (CLASP, 2021).

Cost-sharing partnerships with workforce development boards, housing authorities, and community colleges have also demonstrated success in integrating services into existing local infrastructures, thereby reducing redundancy and enhancing reach (New York State Office for New Americans, 2020).

Equity, Inclusion, and Systemic Accountability

Lastly, practitioner literature affirms that integration must go beyond service provision to include systemic change. Programs should be accountable not only to funders but also to immigrant participants through community advisory boards, multilingual feedback loops, and shared governance models (NYC MOIA, 2019; Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019). Inclusion must be embedded at every stage—from recruitment and curriculum design to evaluation and leadership development (Barker, 2021; Chirkov, 2023).

Emphasizing the interconnectedness of social determinants—education, housing, health, and income—this body of literature advocates for holistic, justice-centered approaches that prioritize the dignity, resilience, and contributions of immigrants.

Alignment of the Project with the Literature and Discipline

The evaluation aligns closely with existing literature and the field of Human Services, particularly within the area of social integration for immigrant populations. This alignment is evident through the project's focus on developing an SI program tailored to assist newly arrived immigrants in New York City with their adaptation and community integration during their initial year in the city.

The evaluation is grounded in sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the role of culture and society in individual development and adaptation. This theoretical framework is central to the design of the SI program, structuring its curriculum and interventions to foster cultural understanding, social engagement, and community mapping. Sociocultural theory emphasizes the significance of social markers, such as language acquisition and cultural adaptation, in the integration processes of immigrants (Abu Jarour, 2022; Chirkov, 2023). By leveraging these concepts, the program addresses both the challenges and opportunities associated with navigating new cultural landscapes, highlighting how social integration fosters personal growth and societal cohesion.

Moreover, the evaluation addresses a critical gap in services identified within the field of Human Services. Currently, there is no structured program in New York City specifically designed to promote the social integration of new immigrants. Research underscores the potential benefits of such programs, including improved social and economic well-being, reduced disparities, and the promotion of social justice (Doshi et al., 2020). These outcomes

align with the fundamental principles of the Human Services discipline, which emphasize empowerment, self-determination, and the promotion of social equity (National Organization of Human Services, 2015). By integrating civic education and community engagement into its curriculum, the proposed program embodies these core values, promoting a holistic approach to social integration.

The methodological framework of the evaluation further reinforces its alignment with the literature and discipline. Utilizing qualitative data collection through interviews with PSMEs in immigrant services, the project gathers rich, detailed insights to inform the program's structure and content. This method ensures that the program is responsive to the nuanced needs of the target population, reflecting best practices in Human Services research and program development.

In summary, the evaluation demonstrates a strong alignment with both the literature on social integration and the principles of the Human Services field. By addressing a critical service gap, grounding its design in sociocultural theory, and employing a rigorous methodological approach, the project contributes to the advancement of social equity and the empowerment of immigrant communities in New York City.

SECTION 2. PROCESS

This section outlines the systematic approach taken to explore the feasibility, design, and implementation of the SI program for newly arrived immigrants in New York City. The process explored key evaluation questions, research design, data collection methods, participant involvement, and ethical considerations that informed the development of this initiative.

Project Questions

This formative evaluation was structured around the following research questions, which served as the central focus of the inquiry.

- Will a Social Integration (SI) program help newly arrived immigrants in New York City transition and integrate into their new environment during their first year of residency?
- What core program components would best support the social integration of newly arrived immigrants?
- What do stakeholders identify as essential to the success of the proposed SI program?
- What structure—such as program format and duration—would be most appropriate for implementing the SI program effectively?
- What potential challenges may arise during the implementation of the program?

These research questions served as the foundation for the study's design and data collection, directing attention toward the development, implementation feasibility, and anticipated impact of a structured SI program. They also facilitated the identification of critical success factors and potential barriers to effective program delivery. By focusing on both content and process, the questions informed the study's contribution to improving service delivery for newly arrived immigrants through an evidence-informed, sociocultural-grounded approach.

Project Design/Method

The evaluation design for the proposed SI program adopted a qualitative research approach to gather rich, contextual insights from key stakeholders on the integration needs of newly arrived immigrants in New York City. This method was chosen because it allows for the exploration of complex social issues through the lived experiences and professional perspectives of those directly involved in immigrant support services.

The qualitative design was especially appropriate given the formative nature of the evaluation, which aimed to inform the development of a culturally responsive and practically relevant program. Through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with subject-matter experts across sectors such as education, legal services, housing, and community organizations, the study captured diverse viewpoints that would not be as accessible through quantitative methods. Furthermore, the chosen approach aligns with the project's sociocultural theoretical framework, which emphasizes the significance of social interactions and environmental context in shaping integration outcomes. By closely aligning with the study's research questions—focused on essential program components, structure, implementation challenges, and stakeholder perspectives—this design ensured that the data collected would directly inform the development and refinement of the SI program.

Methodological Approach and Justification

This evaluation employed a qualitative research design, which was purposefully selected to gain in-depth insights into the social integration needs of newly arrived immigrants in New York City. The qualitative approach is well-suited for exploratory and formative evaluations, particularly when the goal is to understand complex social phenomena from the perspectives of those directly involved (Chirkov, 2023). Given the project's emphasis on developing a program responsive to the lived experiences of immigrants and service providers, qualitative interviews

provided the most effective means of capturing nuanced stakeholder perspectives that quantitative methods may overlook.

The choice of this approach is also aligned with the theoretical underpinnings of the project—sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the importance of social interactions and contextual factors in shaping individual and group behaviors (Chirkov, 2023). A qualitative design enabled the exploration of these interactions within real-world service environments, directly informing the structure and content of the proposed Social Integration (SI) program.

This project adopted a qualitative data collection methodology. The primary tool for data collection was an interview protocol (See Appendix A), which included semi-structured interviews with subject-matter experts, including program managers, social workers, educators, and other human services professionals with experience working with immigrants in New York City, to collect the data set.

Alignment with Research Questions and Objectives

The selected qualitative methodology directly supports the five research questions that guided this formative evaluation, ensuring data collection was closely aligned with the project's goals. These questions are:

- How effectively could a Social Integration (SI) program be designed and implemented for newly arrived immigrants in New York City?
- What core components would best support their social integration?
- What did stakeholders identify as essential to the program's success?
- What structure—such as format and duration—would be most appropriate for implementation?
- What challenges could arise during program implementation?

Qualitative interviews were particularly well-suited for exploring these complex and context-specific questions, as they allowed participants to share rich, experiential insights that would not have been captured through quantitative means (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2015).

For example:

- In addressing Question 1, interviews with subject-matter experts provided direct insights into the perceived feasibility of designing and implementing an SI program, highlighting both systemic barriers and enabling conditions.
- Regarding Question 2, expert responses identified program components such as community-based learning, trauma-informed care, and hybrid instructional formats as crucial for successful integration (AbuJarour, 2022; Hanemann & Robinson, 2022).
- In relation to Question 3, stakeholders emphasized the importance of culturally relevant curriculum, legal literacy, and employment training—features that align with current best practices in immigrant integration programs (Entigar, 2021; Lee et al., 2020).
- To address Question 4, qualitative responses detailed preferences for small class sizes, flexible scheduling, and multi-modal delivery, reflecting an apparent demand for adaptability in program structure (Lou & Noels, 2020).
- Concerning Question 5, participants identified anticipated challenges such as funding sustainability, digital access barriers, and coordination among service providers—issues well-documented in both scholarly and practitioner literature (Macaluso, 2022; Peri, 2016).

This methodological alignment ensured that the data collection process not only gathered stakeholder input but also critically informed the adaptive design of a contextually relevant and

stakeholder-informed SI program. The thematic analysis further enabled the identification of recurring ideas and priorities, offering a systematic approach to interpreting stakeholder narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By grounding this process in sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and best practices in formative evaluation (Patton, 2015), the study ensured theoretical coherence and practical relevance.

Ultimately, the qualitative approach served as both an evaluative and developmental tool, capturing the lived realities of immigrant-serving professionals and transforming those insights into actionable components for the proposed SI program.

Data Collection

The process involved purposive and snowball sampling strategies to recruit 12 participants from different sectors, including education, housing, legal services, and community organizations. Interviews were conducted virtually, primarily via Zoom, to facilitate a convenient and secure data collection process. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and included a set of pre-determined questions designed to gather opinions and suggestions for the proposed SI program.

Instrumentation

An interview protocol structured the interviews, ensuring consistency in the questions asked across participants. This protocol also included measures to address ethical considerations, such as obtaining informed consent and maintaining confidentiality, using alphanumeric pseudonyms (e.g., P1, P2).

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns, themes, and ideas within the interview transcripts. Chat generative pre-trained transformer (GPT) assisted in coding and categorizing data for comprehensive analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical concerns, such as privacy, confidentiality, and data autonomy, were prioritized, with participants' information anonymized and consent obtained and documented prior to the interviews. Capella University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was also obtained to maintain research integrity.

In summary, the qualitative approach was essential to this formative evaluation, enabling the collection of rich, contextually grounded data directly aligned with the research questions. It allowed for an iterative understanding of stakeholder perspectives, informing a social integration program that is culturally responsive, evidence-informed, and practically viable for newly arrived immigrants in New York City. This design ensured alignment with the project's purpose, informing the development of a social integration program that facilitates the social assimilation of newly arrived immigrants, with a focus on social justice, participation, and inclusion.

Stakeholders, Participants, and Target Audience

The success of this formative evaluation was deeply rooted in the active engagement of key stakeholders and expert participants whose contributions provided a multidimensional understanding of the SI needs of newly arrived immigrants. Effective program design—particularly in community-based initiatives—requires the incorporation of diverse professional perspectives to ensure relevance, responsiveness, and feasibility (Palinkas et al., 2015; Patton,

2015). This approach aligns with participatory evaluation practices, which emphasize stakeholder collaboration in shaping program outcomes (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998).

Key Stakeholders and Their Roles

A broad range of stakeholders contributed to this evaluation, offering critical insights from various sectors, including education, legal advocacy, public services, and nonprofit management. Their input helped shape the curriculum, define implementation logistics, and address systemic barriers to immigrant integration. Table 1 provides an overview of stakeholder roles and responsibilities.

Table 1

Stakeholder Roles and Responsibilities

Stakeholder Role	Responsibilities
Program Managers and Supervisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversaw operational logistics • Contributed to the design of participant selection criteria, staffing, and funding structures.
Human Services Professionals (Educators, Social Workers, Case Managers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified integration barriers in education, housing, and employment • Recommended program components for language learning and service navigation.
Community-Based Organizations and Nonprofit Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared field-tested strategies for mentorship, financial literacy, and resource accessibility • Advocated for hybrid learning models.
Legal Experts and Immigration Advocates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlighted legal education as essential • Provided content on immigration processes and access to legal aid.
Government and Policy Advisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informed alignment with municipal and state-level initiatives • Recommended funding mechanisms and policy integration strategies.

The inclusion of these diverse professionals aligns with best practices in immigrant program development, which stress cross-sectoral collaboration to address multifaceted integration challenges (Ager & Strang, 2008; Bloemraad, 2006).

Participant Selection and Diversity

Twelve expert participants were engaged using purposive and snowball sampling methods, both of which are widely recognized as effective methods for qualitative studies involving hard-to-reach or specialized populations (Etikan et al., 2016; Palinkas et al., 2015). Participants were recruited from diverse fields, including adult education (e.g., ESL instructors, job training coaches), immigration legal services (attorneys, legal advocates), housing and case management services, public libraries (community outreach), and employment assistance (HR professionals). This diversity enriched the thematic findings and ensured the evaluation was grounded in practical, field-based knowledge.

Selection Criteria

- Participants were required to be 18 years or older, based in New York City, and have a minimum of five years of experience working with immigrant populations.
- Individuals without direct experience or those expressing discomfort with participation were excluded from the study.
- All participants were informed of their voluntary status and right to withdraw at any time.

These criteria were established to ensure participant credibility and data reliability, consistent with qualitative research standards for expert informant studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Target Audience

The primary audience for this SI program was newly arrived immigrants in New York City, particularly those within their first 12 months of residency. This group is statistically among the most vulnerable, often facing compounded integration challenges, including language barriers, acculturative stress, and limited-service accessibility (Kang et al., 2020; Lou & Noels, 2020). Targeting immigrants during this critical period is strategic; research suggests that early intervention has a significant impact on long-term integration outcomes (Hanemann & Robinson, 2022).

By engaging a diverse range of expert stakeholders and carefully selecting participants with substantial field experience, this evaluation ensured that program design would be informed by both empirical evidence and frontline practice. These efforts collectively aimed to foster a socially inclusive environment that supports the successful adaptation and civic participation of newly arrived immigrants in New York City.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in a formative evaluation is multifaceted, encompassing the systematic investigation, design, and interpretation of data to generate new knowledge and inform practice (Creswell & Poth, 2018). SI program evaluation, I assumed the dual responsibility of investigator and evaluator, guided by a commitment to ethical research practices, stakeholder engagement, and theory-informed inquiry. My primary objective was to examine the structural, contextual, and operational dimensions of immigrant integration efforts in New York City, to inform the design of a responsive and evidence-based SI program.

Evaluation Design and Implementation

I led the development of a formative evaluation framework grounded in sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), ensuring that the inquiry aligned with the core objectives of the SI

initiative. This involved identifying research questions, defining program goals, and establishing evaluation criteria that reflected the unique challenges faced by newly arrived immigrants. The evaluation plan was tailored to explore stakeholder perspectives, program structure, and the effectiveness of integration strategies within real-world human services settings.

Data Collection and Ethical Considerations

As the primary data collector, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with SMEs, including social workers, educators, and program managers. These professionals provided valuable insights into immigrant needs, service delivery barriers, and program development considerations. All research activities complied with ethical standards as approved by the IRB. This included securing informed consent, protecting participant confidentiality, and ensuring voluntary participation in accordance with the ethical guidelines outlined by Patton (2015).

Data Analysis and Reporting

Employing a thematic analysis approach, I systematically coded and interpreted interview data to identify patterns, emergent themes, and stakeholder-driven recommendations. These findings were synthesized into a comprehensive evaluation report that highlighted critical success factors, structural requirements, and potential implementation challenges. The analysis not only informed program refinement but also contributed to the broader discourse on immigrant integration practices in urban contexts.

Through this role, I positioned myself as both an evaluator and change agent—integrating theoretical knowledge, practical insight, and stakeholder input to advance an inclusive and culturally responsive SI program. This approach supports the development of interventions that are context-sensitive, participatory, and capable of addressing systemic inequities in immigrant resettlement and adaptation (Hanemann & Robinson, 2022).

Through these roles, I contributed to a robust understanding of the complexities surrounding immigrant integration and the development of a targeted, evidence-based SI program.

Project Study Protocol

The Project Study Protocol outlines the methodological framework guiding the formative evaluation of the proposed SI program for newly arrived immigrants in New York City. Grounded in sociocultural theory (Chirkov, 2023; Vygotsky, 1978), the protocol details the strategic use of purposive and snowball sampling to recruit subject-matter experts, the application of semi-structured interviews for rich data collection, and the employment of thematic analysis to identify key themes relevant to program design and implementation (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ethical research practices—including informed consent, confidentiality protections, and IRB approval—were prioritized to ensure participant trust and data integrity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2015). By documenting these procedures, this section establishes methodological transparency and reinforces the credibility of the findings, providing a replicable foundation for future research and programmatic interventions in immigrant integration (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Sample

This formative evaluation employed purposive sampling complemented by snowball sampling to recruit SMEs well-versed in immigrant integration. Purposive sampling was used to deliberately select individuals with rich, relevant experience, ensuring they could provide in-depth insights into the phenomenon of interest. This approach aligns with the qualitative design and sociocultural theoretical framework (Vygotsky, 1978) by focusing on information-rich cases embedded in the social context of immigrant support. After initial recruits were identified

through professional networks (e.g., community organizations and service agencies), snowball sampling (chain referral) was employed to reach additional qualified participants recommended by earlier interviewees. Snowball sampling is beneficial for accessing specialized or hard-to-reach populations in this study; it helped identify experts across various organizations who might otherwise have been overlooked.

A total of 12 participants were selected. This sample size was intentionally chosen based on qualitative research guidelines and the principle of data saturation. Prior studies suggest that in homogeneous groups with focused objectives, thematic saturation can often be achieved with around twelve interviews. Guest et al. (2006), for example, found that most themes in their study emerged by the 12th interview. Similarly, Creswell (2015) and other methodological experts note that qualitative inquiry emphasizes depth over breadth, often requiring only a modest number of participants so long as they yield rich, repetitive insights. Thus, 12 participants were deemed sufficient to capture a wide range of perspectives while enabling manageable, deep analysis. The inclusion criteria for participants were deliberately specific to ensure expertise: participants had to (a) be adults (18 years or older), (b) have a minimum of 5 years of experience working with immigrant populations, and (c) have professional knowledge of the New York City context. These criteria were implemented through a brief screening questionnaire administered during recruitment. Potential participants were asked questions such as, *"Are you 18 or older?"*, *"Have you worked with immigrant communities for at least five years?"* and *"Do you live or work in New York City?"* (see Screening Questions in Appendix A). Only those who met all criteria and answered affirmatively were invited to participate. This screening process ensured that each interviewee possessed the practical experience and local context knowledge necessary to inform the development of the SI program.

The resulting sample consisted of diverse professionals across sectors central to the needs of immigrant integration. Participants included experts in adult education (e.g., ESL instructors), legal services (immigration attorneys and advocates), housing support (social workers in housing agencies or shelters), public library outreach (staff running immigrant programs), employment assistance (human resources or job training coaches), and community/social services (nonprofit program managers and case workers). By covering multiple domains, the sample captured a holistic view of challenges and supports for newly arrived immigrants. All participants were assigned alphanumeric pseudonyms (e.g., P1, P2) to de-identify them and protect confidentiality. No real names or specific organizational affiliations are reported in the study in accordance with ethical guidelines.

Although the target sample size was 12, a contingency plan was in place to address participant attrition. Recruitment was slightly oversampled (by identifying a couple of additional eligible candidates) so that if any participant declined or withdrew, a replacement could be invited. Fortunately, all 12 invited SMEs remained committed and completed the interview, resulting in no dropouts. If a withdrawal had occurred, the snowball referral process was poised to quickly identify a new participant with similar qualifications. Additionally, flexible scheduling and clear communication were used to encourage participation and reduce the likelihood of attrition (for example, interview times were arranged at the convenience of participants, and reminders were provided). These strategies ensured that the study retained a sufficient sample to reach saturation and meet its qualitative objectives.

Data Collection

The interview protocol for the SI program served as a structured guide for collecting qualitative data to inform the development of a program aimed at supporting the social

integration of newly arrived immigrants in New York City. Below is a detailed breakdown of the components of the protocol and their purpose:

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the 12 SMEs, conducted via Zoom conferencing (Audio only). A participant recruitment process was carried out prior to interviewing: the researcher reached out to candidates through professional contacts in immigrant service organizations and community networks. Interested candidates first completed the screening questions (as described above) to confirm they met the inclusion criteria. Once eligibility was confirmed, participants were provided with an informed consent form (approved by the Institutional Review Board) via email to review and sign. The consent form explained the study's purpose, procedures, voluntary nature, and measures for confidentiality. After obtaining written consent, I scheduled each interview at a convenient time for the participant. Participants were not offered monetary incentives; however, they were informed that a summary of the project's findings or the program development report would be shared with them as a courtesy for their contribution.

Each interview session lasted approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour and was guided by a predefined interview protocol (see Appendix A). The interviews were semi-structured, following a set of open-ended questions aligned with the research questions (e.g., questions about the perceived needs of immigrants, practical program components, and potential challenges). This format ensured consistency across interviews while allowing flexibility for probing and follow-up questions based on participant responses. All interviews were conducted in English and held one-on-one in a private Zoom meeting room to maintain confidentiality. With participant permission, interviews were audio-recorded (Zoom's recording set to audio-only, with no video retained) to ensure accurate capture of responses. The researcher also took brief field notes

during and immediately after each interview to record observations and potential follow-up points.

The data collection procedure prioritized participant comfort and data quality. At the start of each interview, the researcher re-introduced the study and addressed any last questions before recording, then verbally confirmed consent and the use of a pseudonym. During the interview, participants were identified only by their pseudonyms (e.g., "P5"), and no personally identifying details were solicited beyond general background (such as years of experience or role type). After each interview, the audio recording was transcribed verbatim. The resulting transcripts were carefully reviewed against the recordings for accuracy. To protect identities, any inadvertent mentions of specific names or organizations in the conversation were redacted or replaced with generic descriptors in the transcripts. The final transcripts labeled only with participant codes were then used for analysis. This approach to data collection – from recruitment and screening through interviewing and transcription – was designed to be systematic and reproducible, providing a clear audit trail. Another researcher could replicate the process with the provided level of detail, recruiting similar experts under the same criteria and using the same interview guide to collect comparable data.

Participant Recruitment and Screening

Participants were purposively selected based on their direct experience working with immigrant populations in New York City. Purposive sampling, widely used in qualitative research, allows for the deliberate selection of individuals who possess specific knowledge or expertise relevant to the research topic (Palinkas et al., 2015). This sampling strategy was well-aligned with the study's formative goals and ensured that participants could offer informed perspectives on the social integration needs of immigrants.

Recruitment was conducted via professional contacts, referrals from community organizations, and outreach to established networks serving immigrant communities. Interested individuals first completed a brief screening questionnaire to confirm eligibility based on predefined inclusion criteria, which required at least two years of direct service experience with immigrant populations. This approach was informed by qualitative research standards emphasizing expertise and relevance in sample selection (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Participant Demographics by Sector

The 12 SMEs represented a balanced mix of professional backgrounds, ensuring multi-perspective input. Table 2 presents the distribution of participants by sector:

Table 2

Professional Backgrounds of Interview Participants

Sector	Description	Number of Participants
Education	ESL instructors and adult educators supporting immigrant learners	3
Legal	Immigration attorneys, paralegals, and legal aid professionals	3
Housing	Housing advocates and shelter staff specializing in immigrant transitional support	2
Human Services	Case managers, social workers, and nonprofit professionals providing direct immigrant services	4
Total		12

This diversity allowed the study to capture a wide array of insights into both systemic barriers and programmatic recommendations for integration support (Tong et al., 2007).

Transcription and Confidentiality Measures

Recordings were transcribed verbatim and checked against the original audio to ensure accuracy. Any identifiable references (e.g., names of individuals) were redacted or replaced with neutral terms to protect participant identities. The transcripts, labeled only with pseudonyms, were stored on an encrypted, password-protected device accessible only to the researcher.

To enhance credibility and dependability, techniques such as consistent use of the interview guide, member checking of preliminary findings, and maintenance of an audit trail were employed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The methodological transparency ensures that another researcher could replicate the data collection process under similar conditions.

This systematic approach—from recruitment and screening through transcription and data protection—ensured both methodological rigor and ethical integrity. By capturing detailed, firsthand insights from experienced professionals, the study generated actionable data to inform the design of an SI program tailored to the specific needs of newly arrived immigrants in New York City.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical rigor is paramount when conducting research with human participants, particularly within populations that may experience systemic marginalization or vulnerability, such as newly arrived immigrants. This formative evaluation adhered to the ethical standards set forth by Capella University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and broader ethical principles of respect, beneficence, and justice (Beauchamp & Childress, 2019). Before data collection, full IRB approval was obtained to ensure that participant rights, welfare, and safety were appropriately safeguarded.

Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation

All participants engaged in a two-step informed consent process designed to ensure true comprehension and voluntariness. First, they received a digital consent form outlining the purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, and confidentiality protections associated with the study. Participants were clearly informed of their right to decline or withdraw at any point without penalty. This written consent was electronically signed and returned via secure email. Second, before each Zoom-based interview, the researcher reviewed the key components of the consent form verbally to reaffirm understanding and gain verbal consent. This dual process aligns with qualitative research protocols for safeguarding autonomy (Patton, 2015; Tracy, 2020).

Participants were also explicitly informed that interviews would be audio-recorded for accuracy and that all data would remain confidential. They were reassured of their right to decline to answer any question and to terminate the interview at any time, which reinforced their agency and minimized any undue influence or coercion to participate (Hennink et al., 2020).

Privacy, Confidentiality, and Data Security

Given the personal and potentially sensitive nature of the data collected, stringent privacy and confidentiality measures were employed. Participant identities were anonymized using alphanumeric codes (P1 through P12), and all identifying information was removed or generalized in transcripts. Names of individuals, organizations, or locations mentioned during interviews were redacted to further ensure de-identification.

Audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored in encrypted, password-protected files on the researcher's private, access-restricted computer. Data were not saved on cloud-based platforms to avoid potential breaches. In accordance with Capella University's data retention policy, research data will be retained for seven years and then securely destroyed. These

procedures reflect best practices in data protection in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kaiser, 2009).

Interviews were conducted via Zoom in private settings to prevent eavesdropping. Video features were disabled, reducing visual identifiers and further enhancing confidentiality. Participants were encouraged to find private locations to conduct interviews, which was especially important given their potentially vulnerable status as newcomers navigating complex social systems.

Respect, Cultural Sensitivity, and Risk Minimization

Participants in this study were professionals and service providers within immigrant communities, a population that may encounter secondary exposure to systemic inequities or burnout. The researcher maintained a culturally sensitive and respectful stance throughout the interviews, demonstrating awareness of participants' sociocultural contexts and values (Liamputtong, 2020). This approach facilitated open dialogue and encouraged authentic contributions while minimizing emotional or psychological discomfort.

Although the study was classified as minimal risk, measures were in place to ensure psychological safety. Interview questions were limited to professional insights and programmatic perspectives rather than personal histories. Participants were informed they could skip questions or end participation at any point. The researcher also monitored tone and responses to remain responsive to any signs of discomfort, consistent with ethical standards for interviews with human service professionals (Beskow et al., 2009).

Researcher Positionality and Conflict of Interest

I maintained a reflexive stance throughout the project to mitigate potential bias and undue influence. As a practitioner with prior experience in immigrant integration settings, I was aware

of the risk of positionality affecting data interpretation. To address this, I implemented bracketing strategies—setting aside personal assumptions—to avoid influencing participant narratives and ensure analytical neutrality (Tufford & Newman, 2012).

There were no dual roles or direct supervisory relationships between the researcher and participants, minimizing risks of conflict of interest. The recruitment process—via professional networks and community contacts—ensured participants were not in any position of dependence on the researcher, thus avoiding coercion or undue pressure to participate.

Data Analysis

This study employed a thematic analysis approach to interpret the qualitative data collected from interviews with SMEs and stakeholders involved in immigrant support services. Thematic analysis was selected because it provides a flexible yet rigorous method for identifying patterns across narrative data while accommodating a theoretically informed perspective (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). Given the study's alignment with sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), thematic analysis was particularly suitable for interpreting how social and cultural interactions shape immigrant integration experiences.

Familiarization and Transcription

Data analysis began with verbatim transcription of audio-recorded interviews. The researchers immersed themselves in the data by reading each transcript multiple times making notes on initial impressions, recurring ideas, and contextual cues. This step facilitated a deep understanding of the data, serving as the foundation for coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Codebook Development and Initial Coding

Initial coding was conducted using an inductive, data-driven approach. Each transcript was analyzed line-by-line to identify segments of text that reflected key concepts, perceptions, or

experiences relevant to the research questions. These segments were then labeled with descriptive codes. For example, a statement like "I couldn't understand the healthcare forms" was coded as "language barrier – health system access."

A codebook was iteratively developed and refined during this process. Codes were grouped into categories based on semantic similarity and thematic relevance. The development of the codebook was guided by established principles for qualitative research rigor, including transparency, reflexivity, and reliability (Campbell et al., 2013). Codes were compared across transcripts to ensure consistency and a reflexive memoing process was used to document interpretive decisions and emergent patterns.

Use of AI-Assisted Analysis

To supplement manual coding and enhance analytical rigor, the researcher utilized ChatGPT, a generative AI tool, as a secondary coding assistant. De-identified transcripts were input into the model, which was prompted to identify recurring ideas, key quotations, and potential thematic groupings. This exploratory use of AI follows emerging research on the integration of large language models in qualitative data analysis (Broussard, 2022; Zhu et al., 2023). The AI's output was treated as a form of analyst triangulation, offering a comparative lens to validate or challenge human interpretations.

However, interpretive decisions were ultimately made by the researcher. AI-generated codes were critically assessed for relevance, depth, and contextual accuracy. Instances, where the AI misrepresented nuanced meaning were corrected through human review, ensuring that interpretive validity and theoretical alignment were maintained.

Theme Development and Refinement

I then moved to the thematic development stage, where codes were grouped into potential themes that aligned with the project's research questions. This involved constructing candidate themes, such as "Language and Communication Challenges," "Access to Social Services," "Legal Support Needs," and "Community-Based Resilience."

Themes were reviewed and refined based on internal coherence and distinctiveness. Some preliminary themes were merged or divided to better reflect the complexity of participant narratives. Each final theme was defined clearly, named to capture its essence, and supported by representative quotations to ensure transparency and credibility (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Nowell et al., 2017).

Interpretation and Synthesis

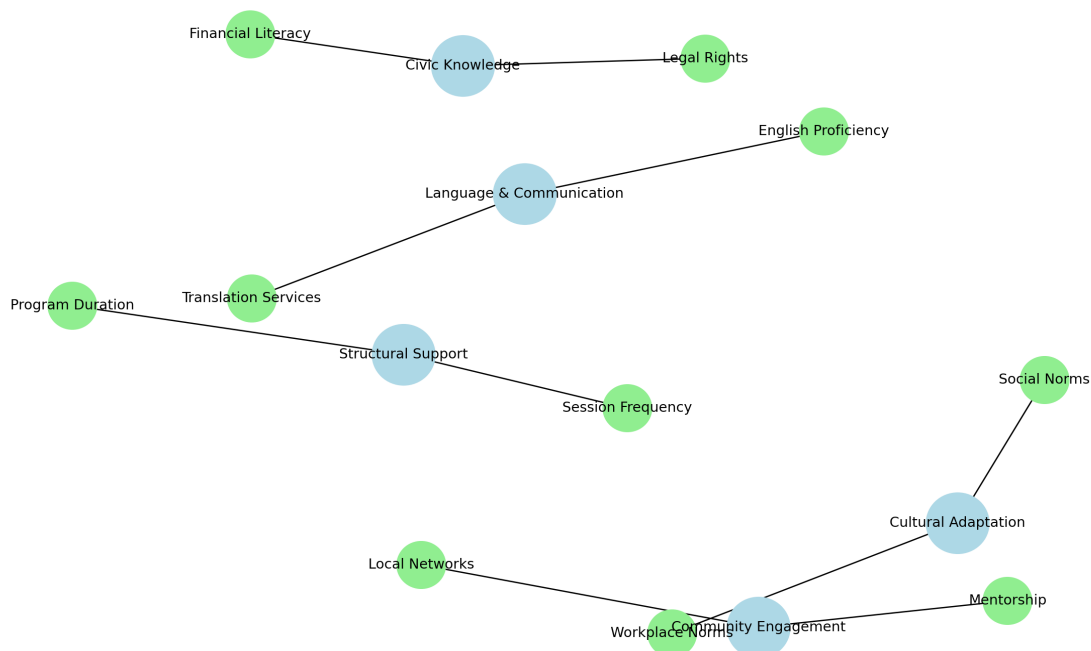
The finalized themes were synthesized into a coherent narrative to provide actionable insights for the design and development of the SI program. This interpretive synthesis emphasized both surface-level content (semantic themes) and deeper meaning (latent themes), consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2006) model. Themes were contextualized within the sociocultural framework, acknowledging the influence of social structures, cultural tools, and institutional barriers on the immigrant experience (Ager & Strang, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978).

The themes illuminated the real-world implications of integration challenges, such as the urgent need for culturally responsive ESL programs, better legal navigation support, and structured community-building initiatives. Representative quotations from participants are integrated into the Results section to illustrate thematic findings.

Visual Representation

To facilitate understanding of relationships among themes and to illustrate coding decisions, I developed a thematic map (see Figure 1 below). This visual tool demonstrated how different themes intersected with broader programmatic concerns and highlighted priority areas for SI program development. Additionally, a summary matrix (Table 3) was used to cross-tabulate themes with interview participants to ensure saturation and traceability.

Figure 1. Thematic Map of Key Themes in SI Program Development



Thematic Map of Key Themes in SI Program Development. This visual illustrates the relationships among central themes (e.g., "Language & Communication," "Civic Knowledge") and their respective subthemes, as identified during the thematic analysis. It demonstrates how these themes intersect with programmatic priorities and informs targeted areas for intervention.

Table 3*Theme-Participant Summary Matrix*

Participant	English Proficiency	Translation Services	Legal Rights	Financial Literacy	Workplace Norms	Social Norms	Mentorship	Local Networks	Program Duration	Session Frequency
P1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
P2	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
P3	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1
P4	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	1
P5	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
P6	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
P7	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	0
P8	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
P9	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1
P10	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1
P11	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	1
P12	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1

Table 3: Theme-Participant Summary Matrix cross-tabulates themes with interview participants (P1–P12) to confirm data saturation and ensure traceability of findings across the dataset. Each “1” indicates that the corresponding theme was discussed or emphasized by that participant.

Descriptive Summary of Participant

Although demographic identifiers were limited to protect confidentiality, a descriptive analysis of the participant pool was conducted. All participants were professionals working in immigrant-serving roles, such as program managers, legal advocates, and case workers. Descriptive statistics, such as role type and years of experience, were summarized without compromising participant anonymity.

SECTION 3. FINDINGS AND APPLICATION

Relevant Outcomes and Findings

This section presents the study's findings and discusses their implications in relation to the research questions. The findings are analyzed in comparison with existing literature, highlighting areas of alignment, divergence, and new insights. Additionally, unexpected findings are explored, and their implications for theory, practice, and policy are discussed.

Summary of Section 2 and Transition to Findings

Section 2 provided a comprehensive overview of the methodological approach guiding this formative evaluation, including participant recruitment, ethical considerations, and thematic analysis of qualitative interview data. The data were gathered from 12 subject matter experts (SMEs) representing diverse sectors, including education, legal services, housing, and employment, all with extensive experience supporting immigrant communities in New York City.

Using thematic analysis, eight core themes emerged, ranging from language barriers and employment readiness to psychosocial support and program structure. These themes provided a strong foundation for understanding the SI needs of newly arrived immigrants and informed the design and strategic priorities of the proposed program.

Dissemination and Use of Findings

The evaluation findings were or will be shared with key stakeholders—including program leaders, service providers, and policymakers—through a summary program development report. As communicated to participants during the consent process, the final findings will be shared with contributors to ensure transparency and support stakeholder engagement in program refinement.

To evaluate outcomes once the program is implemented, metrics such as participant engagement, language proficiency, job placement rates, and civic participation will be tracked through pre- and post-program assessments, stakeholder feedback, and ongoing qualitative feedback loops. This iterative evaluation strategy ensures continuous improvement aligned with community needs.

Comparative Analysis with Existing Literature

The findings broadly affirm existing literature on immigrant integration. Language acquisition, workforce readiness, and wraparound services emerged as top priorities, aligning with studies that emphasize structured English instruction and career development as foundational elements of integration (Lee et al., 2020; Lou & Noels, 2020; Macaluso, 2022).

Stakeholders' strong endorsement of trauma-informed support and mental health integration also echoes the growing recognition in the literature of psychosocial stress as a barrier to integration (AbuJarour, 2022; Doshi et al., 2020). However, notable contrasts emerged. While academic sources advocate for hybrid service delivery models due to their flexibility and scalability (AbuJarour, 2022), participants highlighted that digital access limitations could hinder participation, particularly among older immigrants and those with limited literacy. This divergence signals a critical implementation consideration for program designers.

Unexpected or Contradictory Results

Two unexpected findings surfaced during the analysis. First, despite the widespread institutional push for digital programming, several experts cautioned that many immigrants lack the necessary technological tools and literacy to participate fully in online learning. This

contradicts prevailing narratives and suggests that integration initiatives should include digital literacy training and the distribution of equipment to ensure equitable access.

Second, the unanimous call for embedding mental health support within core programming—not as an adjunct service—highlights a paradigm shift in practice. While many existing programs separate mental health from educational or vocational components, participants advocated for its integration across all modules, framing emotional well-being as essential to successful social integration.

Based on the meeting transcripts, the following key outcomes and findings emerged from the discussions on developing the SI program for newly arrived immigrants in New York City.

Table 4 presents the key themes identified through the interviews.

Table 4

Key Themes and Project Questions Addressed by Theme

THEME	PROJECT QUESTION ADDRESSED
THEME 1. Social Integration for Immigrants	What are the key components of an effective social integration program for newly arrived immigrants?
THEME 2. Language Barriers / Importance of Language Acquisition	How can social integration programs address immediate and long-term needs such as language proficiency?
THEME 3. Program Structure and Duration	What strategies can enhance the sustainability and accessibility of social integration programs for diverse immigrant populations?
THEME 4. Employment and Skill Development	How can social integration programs support job readiness for newly arrived immigrants?
THEME 5. Challenges in Program Implementation / Challenges in Social Integration	What potential challenges may arise during the implementation of a social integration program?
THEME 6. Funding and Budgeting / Funding Strategies	How can social integration programs address the emotional and psychological well-being of immigrants?
THEME 7. Psychosocial and Mental Health Needs	What financial models can support the sustainability of social integration programs?

Table 5*Visual Depiction of Outcomes and Findings (Themes)*

Theme	Key Findings	Participant Quotes
Language and Communication Barriers	Limited English proficiency hindered access to employment, education, and healthcare. Participants emphasized the need for integrated English instruction and practical communication skills.	"Many can't find jobs because they don't understand the job postings or interviews."
Civic Education and Legal Literacy	Stakeholders stressed the importance of legal orientation, rights education, and understanding of local government systems to support informed decision-making.	"Knowing your rights can prevent so many bad situations – especially for women and workers."
Community Engagement and Mentorship	Mentorship was highlighted as essential for building trust, providing guidance, and reducing isolation. Peer and community-led initiatives were favored.	"Having someone from the same background helps you feel less alone and more confident."
Program Structure and Delivery	Participants recommended a modular structure with flexible schedules, including online and in-person sessions to accommodate diverse needs.	"If it's too long or too often, people won't come. Make it flexible but consistent."
Access to Services and Resources	Many immigrants were unaware of available services or faced bureaucratic obstacles. A centralized, accessible information system was suggested.	"There's help out there, but new immigrants just don't know where to start."
Cultural Adaptation Challenges	Cultural differences in work ethics, gender roles, and social norms created integration difficulties. Programs should include cultural competence components.	"You can't expect people to behave 'American' overnight. Culture takes time to learn."
Stakeholder Collaboration	Ongoing collaboration with CBOs, advocacy groups, and local agencies was seen as critical for sustainability and responsiveness of the SI program.	"We need all hands – legal, schools, social workers – it has to be a team effort."

Note: This table presents the key themes identified from the interview data, summarized findings related to each theme, and selected participant quotes that support each outcome. This visual depiction supports thematic interpretation in Section 3 of the Capstone project.

Theme 1: Social Integration for Newly Arrived Immigrants

A recurring theme across stakeholder interviews was the importance of structured social integration programs to facilitate immigrants' adaptation to life in New York City. Participants emphasized that a well-designed program should provide guidance on cultural norms, societal values, and access to essential services such as healthcare, education, and employment. This aligns with prior research indicating that structured social integration programs enhance social cohesion and reduce disparities (AbuJarour, 2022; Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019).

Additionally, the findings suggest that integration programs should balance cultural adaptation with identity preservation, ensuring that immigrants retain their unique cultural identities while adapting to a new social environment. This contrasts with traditional assimilationist models that prioritize cultural conformity over integration (Chirkov, 2023).

Theme 2. Language Barriers and Communication Challenges

Language emerged as the most significant barrier to social integration. Participants reported that many immigrants struggle to access essential services due to limited English proficiency, which hinders their ability to navigate public transportation, seek healthcare, and secure employment. This finding aligns with previous studies emphasizing that language acquisition is foundational to social and economic integration (Lee et al., 2020; Lou & Noels, 2020).

Stakeholders suggested that the SI program should offer targeted English language instruction, with a focus on practical communication skills relevant to daily interactions and job

readiness. The literature supports this approach, highlighting the effectiveness of task-based and immersion language learning methods (Kang et al., 2020).

Unexpectedly, some participants raised concerns about the digital divide, noting that many immigrants lack access to online language resources and virtual learning platforms. This contradicts assumptions that hybrid learning models inherently increase accessibility and suggests that integration programs should incorporate in-person language support alongside digital resources.

Theme 3. Program Structure and Delivery Format

Findings indicated strong support for a flexible, hybrid program model, combining small-group, in-person sessions with online learning modules to accommodate different learning styles and schedules. Participants emphasized the benefits of small class sizes (10-12 participants) for fostering personalized instruction and peer support, which aligns with best practices in adult education (Macaluso, 2022).

However, a notable divergence from existing literature was the preference for in-person over virtual learning for newly arrived immigrants. While prior studies advocate for digital learning as a scalable solution (AbuJarour, 2022), several participants cited technological literacy gaps and digital access barriers as challenges. This suggests that programs should ensure digital inclusivity by offering technology training and access to community learning centers.

Theme 4. Employment and Workforce Readiness

Research Question Addressed. How can social integration programs support job readiness for newly arrived immigrants?

Employment emerged as a critical concern, with participants emphasizing that many immigrants struggle to secure jobs due to credential recognition issues, lack of U.S. work

experience, and unfamiliarity with workplace norms. The findings reinforce previous research suggesting that employment-focused interventions improve integration outcomes by fostering financial stability and self-sufficiency (Peri, 2016).

Stakeholders recommended that the SI program include job readiness workshops, resume-building assistance, and networking opportunities to help immigrants navigate the job market. This recommendation aligns with evidence that targeted workforce training improves employment prospects for immigrants (Hanemann & Robinson, 2022).

Theme 5. Challenges in Program Implementation

Research Question Addressed. What potential challenges may arise during the implementation of a social integration program?

Participants identified funding constraints, staffing shortages, and logistical difficulties as potential barriers to program implementation. A key concern was the sustainability of funding, with stakeholders advocating for a diverse funding model incorporating government grants, private sector support, and modest participant contributions.

Additionally, findings revealed concerns about service provider burnout, as social workers and educators often face high caseloads and limited resources. This highlights the need for ongoing professional development and support for service providers, an aspect that is underexplored in existing literature.

Theme 6. Psychosocial and Mental Health Needs

Research Question Addressed. How can social integration programs address the emotional and psychological well-being of immigrants?

Mental health challenges, including stress, anxiety, and social isolation, were frequently cited as barriers to successful integration. The findings align with research emphasizing

that immigrants often experience acculturative stress due to cultural displacement and economic pressures (Doshi et al., 2020).

Participants recommended that the SI program incorporate mental health awareness training, peer support groups, and culturally responsive counseling services. Prior studies indicate that community-based mental health interventions can significantly improve immigrants' well-being (Barker, 2021). The inclusion of trauma-informed support within integration programs is an area warranting further exploration.

Theme 7. Funding and Program Sustainability

Research Question Addressed. What financial models can support the sustainability of social integration programs?

Sustainable funding was identified as a critical factor for program longevity. Stakeholders supported a mixed funding model, incorporating:

- Public sector support (state and municipal grants)
- Private sector contributions (corporate sponsorships, philanthropic donations)
- Nominal participant contributions (on a sliding scale to maintain accessibility)

This approach aligns with best practices in nonprofit program funding but diverges from models that rely exclusively on government funding, which can be unpredictable (Macaluso, 2022). The findings underscore the importance of financial diversification in preventing funding instability.

Social integration programs play a crucial role in helping immigrants adjust to life in their host country, particularly in diverse and fast-paced urban environments like New York City. These programs provide essential support by addressing cultural, linguistic, and economic barriers that immigrants face. The following table presents a thematic analysis of social

integration programs, highlighting key topic areas, core ideas, and significant themes that influence the success of these initiatives. This analysis provides insight into the structural components, challenges, and outcomes associated with integration efforts, emphasizing the importance of language acquisition, employment support, mental health considerations, and funding sustainability.

The following table presents a synthesized thematic analysis derived from interviews with key stakeholders involved in immigrant support services. This analysis identifies core topic areas, summarizes key findings, and includes representative participant responses that illuminate the lived experiences and professional insights surrounding social integration for newly arrived immigrants. Each theme reflects a distinct dimension of the integration process—ranging from language acquisition and program structure to mental health, employment readiness, and funding strategies. These themes directly correspond with the conclusions drawn from the study and provide a visual summary of the multifaceted factors influencing the development and implementation of effective social integration programs. The table serves as an essential reference point for understanding the practical and policy-related considerations necessary to design equitable, sustainable, and responsive integration pathways.

Table 6*Thematic Analysis for the SI Program*

<i>Topic Area / Theme</i>	<i>Core Idea / Summary of Findings</i>	<i>Key Topics & Participant Responses</i>
Social Integration for Immigrants	Facilitating cultural and social adaptation for newly arrived immigrants.	"Many immigrants struggle with knowing where to go for services. Without proper guidance, they feel lost." (P1, P4, P10)
Language Barriers / Importance of Language Acquisition	Addressing communication challenges that hinder integration. Language skills, particularly English, are critical for job placement, education, and navigating daily life.	"Learning English is a priority. Without it, they can't fully participate in society or get stable jobs." (P1, P2, P4, P5)
Program Structure and Duration	Ensuring the program structure meets diverse participant needs. A mix of online and in-person learning with flexible schedules was suggested to accommodate working immigrants.	We need a flexible program—some prefer in-person learning, but online options can help those with tight schedules. (P1, P3, P4, P7)
Employment and Skill Development	Providing skills and job training for professional integration.	Need for job readiness skills (e.g., applications, interviews, networking); importance of technical and financial skills (P3, P5, P7, P11)
Challenges in Program Implementation / Challenges in Social Integration	Identifying and mitigating obstacles in implementation. Immigrants face language barriers, lack of cultural understanding, and difficulties accessing services.	Many immigrants struggle with knowing where to go for services. Without proper guidance, they feel lost. (P1, P2, P7, P8)
Funding and Budgeting / Funding Strategies	Exploring sustainable funding sources for program longevity. A combination of government grants, private donations, and user fees was proposed for sustainability.	Government funding is ideal, but having private sector support and minimal user fees will ensure longevity. (P2, P3, P6, P8)
Psychosocial and Mental Health Needs	Addressing emotional and psychological struggles faced by immigrants.	Stress due to migration, unemployment, and work-study balance; need for emotional support programs (P4, P6, P8, P9)
Participant Recruitment and Networking / Recruitment Strategies	Developing effective recruitment strategies for program participation. Participants emphasized the use of purposive and snowball sampling to connect with professionals in the field.	Purposive sampling will help us target professionals with direct experience, while snowball sampling allows us to expand our network organically. (P2, P3, P7, P12)

In conclusion, the thematic analysis highlights critical areas of focus that are essential for the development of effective social integration programs for immigrants. Key themes, including

language instruction, cultural adaptation, structured learning environments, funding challenges, and the necessity for ongoing support, highlight the multifaceted nature of immigrant integration. These findings suggest that successful programs must address immediate needs and provide sustainable, adaptable solutions that are sensitive to the unique challenges immigrants encounter in both professional and personal contexts. Moreover, the emphasis on funding and continuous support underscores the importance of long-term investment and resource allocation to ensure program efficacy and resilience. This analysis provides a foundational framework for designing programs that foster holistic and equitable integration pathways for immigrants.

Implications for Policy, Practice, and Future Research

The findings of this formative evaluation present significant implications across theoretical, practical, and policy domains, particularly in the development and implementation of SI programs for newly arrived immigrants in metropolitan areas like New York City.

Theoretical Implications

This study reinforces and extends the core principles of sociocultural theory, especially the emphasis on mediated learning, reciprocal adaptation, and the centrality of cultural tools in social development (Chirkov, 2023; Vygotsky, 1978). Participants emphasized the importance of socially situated learning environments, community engagement, and bicultural navigation—key components that affirm the theory's view of learning as a socially embedded process. Additionally, the findings contribute to the theoretical literature by highlighting the dual role of cultural adaptation and identity preservation, demonstrating that integration is a two-way, co-constructive process involving both immigrants and host communities (Ager & Strang, 2008; Hanemann & Robinson, 2022).

Practical Implications

Practitioners responsible for designing and implementing SI programs should adopt trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and modular program structures. The data support the use of small-group, in-person learning environments, flexible scheduling, and peer mentorship to enhance engagement and retention (Lou & Noels, 2020; Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2019). Mental health support, civic education, and legal literacy should be embedded as core program components—not optional add-ons—to promote comprehensive adaptation. Furthermore, employment-focused modules and real-life application exercises were viewed as crucial to achieving long-term integration goals (Kang et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2020).

Policy Implications

On a policy level, the study points to the need for coordinated, citywide integration frameworks that reflect immigrant voices and promote digital inclusion (AbuJarour, 2022; NYC Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs [MOIA], 2023). Stable funding streams, institutionalized multilingual service delivery standards, and sliding-scale access models were consistently identified as structural necessities. The findings also support the promotion of public-private partnerships to ensure sustainability, scalability, and innovation in SI programming (Doshi et al., 2020; DYCD, 2022).

Directions for Future Research

Future research should focus on longitudinal evaluations of SI program outcomes, particularly their effects on employment, civic engagement, and social cohesion. Studies exploring how immigrants' cultural identity, institutional trust, and social networks evolve over time would enhance theoretical models and inform evidence-based practices. Additionally, comparative studies examining the impact of trauma-informed and culturally tailored

interventions across diverse immigrant populations could further refine integration frameworks and policies.

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the essential components of an effective social integration program for newly arrived immigrants in New York City. By addressing language barriers, employment challenges, mental health needs, and funding sustainability, the SI program can significantly enhance immigrants' ability to integrate successfully into their new communities. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to assess program outcomes, the role of digital accessibility in integration, and the effectiveness of trauma-informed mental health interventions for immigrant populations.

Application and Benefits

The findings from this formative evaluation present multiple pathways for applying the insights gained through stakeholder interviews to the design, implementation, and replication of a comprehensive SI program for immigrants in New York City. Furthermore, these insights make a meaningful contribution to the broader academic and professional discourse on immigrant integration, bridging notable gaps in the literature and offering scalable strategies for practitioners and policymakers across diverse contexts.

Application in Broader Contexts

While the SI program was designed with New York City in mind, the structure, principles, and strategies derived from this evaluation are applicable to other urban centers and communities with significant immigrant populations. The program's flexible, modular design and emphasis on localized adaptation make it transferable to diverse settings—whether large metropolitan cities or smaller communities undergoing demographic change. Organizations, such as nonprofit agencies, city councils, and immigrant support centers, can adopt and customize the

curriculum, recruitment strategies, and service models to meet the specific needs of their populations.

The findings can also inform state and federal initiatives aimed at standardizing integration services. By promoting experiential learning, hybrid formats, and trauma-informed practices, this evaluation provides a replicable framework that other regions can utilize to enhance their immigrant support infrastructures.

Contributions to Knowledge and Practice

This project expands existing theories—particularly sociocultural theory—by emphasizing the integration of community-based knowledge with structured learning to facilitate cognitive, social, and emotional adaptation among immigrants. The findings underscore that integration is not a linear or uniform process; instead, it requires culturally responsive programming, continuous adaptation, and empowerment-oriented methodologies that reflect the realities of the community. This project reinforces and extends sociocultural theory by integrating field-derived practical knowledge into a theoretical structure grounded in community engagement and social development.

Moreover, the evaluation directly addresses a critical gap identified in the scholarly literature: the absence of structured, community-informed SI programs tailored for newly arrived immigrants in urban U.S. contexts. While some literature explores integration challenges and policy-level strategies, few provide a comprehensive, practice-informed program model that combines curriculum development, sustainability planning, and service provider support. By addressing this void, the study not only advances the field of Human Services but also contributes actionable insights that can shape future research, theory, and practice.

Highlighted Benefits

To streamline and emphasize the most significant benefits from the findings, the following are identified as core outcomes of the proposed SI program:

- **Empowered Immigrants.** Immigrants gain immediate, practical skills in language, employment readiness, and system navigation, enhancing their self-sufficiency and reducing their dependence on intermediaries.
- **Improved Mental Health and Social Belonging.** Integrated psychosocial support helps immigrants manage cultural and emotional stress, fostering resilience and a sense of community.
- **Flexible, Accessible Learning.** Hybrid models and modular curricula accommodate diverse schedules and learning needs, improving participation and retention rates.
- **Scalable and Sustainable Programming.** Mixed funding models and efficient use of resources enable long-term sustainability and replicability in other settings.
- **Strengthened Human Services.** Training and support for service providers lead to more culturally competent, empathetic, and effective service delivery, ultimately reducing burnout and turnover.
- **Community and Policy Advancement.** The model informs local and national integration policies by providing evidence-based practices that address systemic barriers, foster inclusion, and enhance civic engagement among immigrant populations.

This application of interview insights into the social integration program's structure, curriculum, and delivery will create a supportive and effective learning environment. It will empower immigrants by giving them the tools to integrate successfully, build resilience, and contribute actively to their communities. Moreover, the program's sustainable funding and well-

supported service providers ensured its longevity, scalability, and adaptability to serve more immigrants effectively in the future.

Implications

The findings from this study highlighted critical implications for policymakers and practitioners seeking to develop and implement effective social integration programs for newly arrived immigrants. Addressing the diverse challenges faced by immigrant communities requires a multifaceted approach that combines robust policy frameworks with practical, community-driven solutions. This section bridges the research insights with actionable recommendations, emphasizing the importance of sustainable funding, cultural sensitivity, and adaptability in program design. By integrating these elements, policymakers and practitioners can create a supportive infrastructure that not only meets the immediate needs of immigrants but also fosters their long-term self-sufficiency and community engagement. The following recommendations outline strategic actions for enhancing immigrant integration efforts, addressing systemic barriers, and ensuring the longevity of these critical programs.

Recommendations for Policy

Based on the insights gathered from the interviews, this study presents a series of key policy recommendations aimed at supporting the successful implementation of the SI program for newly arrived immigrants and improving the broader infrastructure for immigrant integration in New York City. These recommendations are grounded in qualitative data collected from subject matter experts and practitioners with firsthand experience in immigrant support services. Each policy proposal is accompanied by a clear rationale and a set of actionable strategies designed to enhance feasibility and effectiveness. The goal is to inform local and state policymakers, program developers, and community stakeholders about evidence-based practices that can address systemic barriers to integration. Table 7 presents the policy recommendations,

their justifications, and potential implementation pathways in a structured format, facilitating strategic planning and policy formulation.

Table 7.

Policy Recommendations

Policy Recommendation	Rationale	Potential Actions
<p><i>Secure and Expand Funding for Social Integration Programs</i></p> <p>Develop stable public funding sources at city, state, and federal levels specifically allocated for immigrant integration programs, with options for matching grants from private entities and nonprofit partnerships.</p>	<p>A consistent funding source would ensure the longevity and reliability of social integration programs, preventing disruptions caused by financial instability. The program could be funded through initiatives such as state-managed integration funds or community development grants.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish dedicated funding lines within municipal and state budgets to support immigrant integration efforts. • Create public-private partnerships with incentives for companies that contribute financially to these programs. • Implement small co-payment policies, where feasible, to foster a sense of ownership and value among participants.
<p><i>Standardize Cultural and Language Support in Essential Services</i></p> <p>Mandate cultural competency and language accessibility training for all staff in public service roles (e.g., healthcare, housing, education) to ensure they can effectively communicate with and support non-English-speaking immigrants.</p>	<p>Language and cultural barriers are primary obstacles to accessing essential services. Standardized training would reduce misunderstandings and improve the quality of services provided to immigrants.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish certification requirements in cultural competency and language accessibility for professionals in public services. • Incentivize hiring of bilingual and culturally aware staff in key immigrant services sectors. • Require the provision of translated materials in commonly spoken immigrant languages.
<p><i>Support Experiential Learning Opportunities within Integration Programs</i></p> <p>Encourage experiential learning components, such as internships, job shadowing, and field trips, within funded integration programs to enhance practical understanding of societal systems (e.g., healthcare, transportation, legal system).</p>	<p>Real-world experiences enhance learning outcomes by allowing immigrants to apply theoretical knowledge in practical contexts, accelerating their adjustment to U.S. systems.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with local businesses, nonprofits, and government agencies to create job shadowing and internship opportunities for immigrants enrolled in integration programs. • Offer tax benefits to companies providing experiential learning placements for newly arrived immigrants. • Fund short field trips as part of integration programs to expose immigrants to essential services like hospitals, community centers, and public offices.

Table 7 (Continued)		
Policy Recommendation	Rationale	Potential Actions
<p><i>Improve Accessibility to Mental Health and Social Support Services</i></p> <p>Expand access to mental health resources tailored to the needs of immigrants, including language-specific counseling services and culturally relevant support groups.</p>	<p>Many immigrants experience psychosocial stress due to cultural adaptation, family separation, and economic pressures. Accessible mental health services tailored to immigrant experiences would help mitigate these challenges and support healthier transitions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase funding for mental health services within immigrant communities and provide training to social workers on culturally sensitive counseling. • Create culturally diverse, multilingual support groups for immigrants and encourage their inclusion in integration programs. • Require integration programs to include information on available mental health services and facilitate access as needed.
<p><i>Institutionalize Small Group and Hybrid Learning Formats in Integration Programs</i></p> <p>Institutionalize small group learning formats and hybrid (in-person and online) class structures within integration programs to allow for personalized, accessible education tailored to varying immigrant schedules.</p>	<p>Small-group settings improve engagement, focus, and participant retention. Hybrid models offer flexibility, allowing more immigrants to participate without compromising their work or family responsibilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop city and state guidelines for hybrid, small-group integration programs, and allocate funding to organizations willing to adopt this structure. • Partner with community centers to offer virtual classrooms and small, locally accessible in-person sessions. • Evaluate program outcomes in hybrid and small group formats to assess the effectiveness of this approach and adjust as needed.
<p><i>Enhance Support for Social Service Professionals Working with Immigrants</i></p> <p>Offer subsidies, continuous training, and mental health support to human services professionals working with immigrant populations to reduce burnout and turnover.</p>	<p>High demands and limited resources make it challenging for social service professionals to provide sustained support to immigrant communities. Policies that support these professionals improve service quality and program continuity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide mental health resources and subsidized counseling for social service professionals to address burnout. • Establish mandatory, ongoing cultural competency training funded by the city or state for service providers working with immigrant populations. • Create a financial incentive program (such as loan forgiveness or grants) to attract and retain skilled social service professionals in high-demand immigrant support roles.

Table 7 (Cont.)		
Policy Recommendation	Rationale	Potential Actions
<p><i>Implement Data-Driven Policy Adjustments Based on Program Feedback</i></p> <p>Use data and feedback from social integration programs to inform policy adjustments and program improvements, ensuring responsiveness to the evolving needs of immigrant communities.</p>	<p>Regular feedback and data collection allow policymakers to track program effectiveness, identify gaps, and adapt policies based on immigrant experiences and outcomes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require integration programs to collect standardized participant feedback and report findings to policymakers annually. • Use data on program outcomes (e.g., employment rates, English proficiency, health service access) to inform future funding and policy adjustments. • Establish an advisory council of immigrant community representatives to provide insights and feedback on integration program policy needs.

Expected Benefits of Implementing These Policy Recommendations

The implementation of targeted and inclusive policies can significantly enhance the infrastructure supporting immigrant integration, contributing to a more welcoming, efficient, and responsive environment for newly arrived populations. Stable and diversified funding mechanisms are foundational to sustaining integration programs, ensuring continuity and adaptability in service provision (Fix et al., 2017; Migration Policy Institute, 2022). Enhanced access to critical services—such as language acquisition, employment support, and healthcare—paired with culturally competent mental health resources can address the multifaceted challenges immigrants face during resettlement (Chirkov, 2023; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [NASEM], 2017). In addition, investing in the training and retention of human service professionals ensures that those facilitating integration are equipped to deliver trauma-informed, participant-centered support (Kirmayer et al., 2011). The systematic collection of feedback and data-driven evaluation practices enables policymakers to refine and adapt programming in real-time, aligning with evolving community needs and promoting equitable, long-term outcomes (Patton, 2015; Phillimore, 2020). Taken together, these strategies not only

foster smoother transitions and greater self-sufficiency for immigrants but also contribute to social cohesion and inclusive community development.

Recommendations for Practice

Grounded in the findings of this formative evaluation and informed by the qualitative insights of SMEs, the following practical recommendations are designed to optimize the implementation and effectiveness of an SI program for newly arrived immigrants in New York City. Based on the meeting summaries and stakeholder interviews, these recommendations aim to enhance the program's structure, delivery, and participant engagement while also supporting the professionals who facilitate immigrant integration. Anchored in sociocultural theory, the recommendations emphasize participant-centered design, culturally responsive pedagogy, and experiential learning that aligns with the real-world needs of immigrants navigating complex social, economic, and institutional landscapes. Table 8 delineates a comprehensive set of evidence-based strategies, detailing each recommendation's rationale, practical application, and anticipated outcomes. Collectively, these practices are intended to build a flexible, accessible, and sustainable integration framework that promotes self-sufficiency, social belonging, and long-term resilience among immigrant populations.

Table 8*Recommendations for Practice*

Recommendation Area	Recommendation	Practice	Expected Outcome
Implement a Flexible, Participant-Centered Curriculum	Design a curriculum covering essential integration topics with flexible modules.	Begin with a needs assessment to tailor the curriculum to each group.	Increased engagement, faster learning, and relevant skill development.
Incorporate Experiential Learning for Practical Skills	Use field trips, simulations, and role-playing to teach practical skills.	Include visits to local offices and real-life scenario practice.	Greater confidence and real-world preparedness among participants.
Adopt a Hybrid Learning Model with Small Group Classes	Use hybrid classes (in-person and virtual) with small groups for personal attention.	Hold classes 3–5 times per week with 10–12 participants; offer online modules.	More supportive learning environment and improved accessibility.
Address Language Barriers Through Targeted Language Instruction	Provide foundational English instruction and multilingual materials.	Start with intensive English classes and translated resources.	Improved communication and independent service navigation.
Include Comprehensive Information on Resource Access and Community Services	Provide detailed guidance on accessing community, health, and legal services.	Dedicate sessions to navigating resources with practical guides.	Enhanced self-sufficiency and informed decision-making.
Build a Network of Support Through Peer Groups and Community Mentors	Create peer groups and mentorship with local volunteers and former immigrants.	Pair participants with mentors and hold peer discussion sessions.	Reduced isolation and increased social-emotional support.
Provide Continuous Training for Service Providers on Cultural Competency	Offer regular training for service providers in cultural and trauma-informed care.	Host workshops and invite experts to train providers.	Better quality of support and stronger participant-provider relationships.
Establish Clear Protocols for Participant Feedback and Program Evaluation	Collect ongoing participant feedback to refine program design and delivery.	Use surveys and focus groups after modules to gather feedback.	Program remains effective, relevant, and participant-driven.
Foster Connections with Local Organizations for Job Training and Placement Opportunities	Partner with businesses for job training, internships, and employment pathways.	Collaborate with businesses offering internships and job shadowing.	Participants gain experience and move toward economic independence.
Design a Sustainable Funding Model with Public and Private Partnerships	Secure funding through a mix of public, private, and nonprofit sources.	Pursue co-funding opportunities and grant-based contributions.	Program sustainability and resilience against financial disruptions.

Anticipated Benefits of Implementing These Recommendations

These practical recommendations aim to establish a responsive, adaptable, and participant-centered social integration program that effectively addresses the complex and evolving needs of newly arrived immigrants. Grounded in adult learning theory and sociocultural frameworks, the emphasis on flexible curricula, experiential skill-building, and community-based support mechanisms fosters both self-sufficiency and psychosocial well-being among participants (Chirkov, 2023; Knowles et al., 2015; Vygotsky, 1978). The incorporation of modular and culturally relevant instruction, coupled with structured mentorship and access to public services, enhances participants' capacity to navigate institutional systems and engage meaningfully in civic life (Ager & Strang, 2008; Phillimore, 2020). Furthermore, continuous capacity-building for human service professionals and the establishment of stable funding streams are essential for ensuring the sustainability, scalability, and long-term impact of the integration program (Fix et al., 2017; OECD, 2023). By embedding these structural supports, the program contributes to broader efforts toward social cohesion, equity, and inclusive community development in host societies (Benton et al., 2018).

Recommendations for Future Work

While this formative evaluation offers critical insights into the structural design, implementation strategies, and stakeholder-informed practices of an SI program tailored for newly arrived immigrants in New York City, it is essential to acknowledge and address the study's limitations to guide future research and policy development. The qualitative methodology, though rich in context-specific detail, involved a purposive sample of subject matter experts, which may limit generalizability across diverse immigrant populations and geographic contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Future research should consider mixed methods

approaches that incorporate both qualitative and quantitative data to triangulate findings and strengthen external validity (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking program participants over time could offer valuable insights into the sustained impact of integration interventions on social, economic, and psychological outcomes (OECD, 2023; Phillimore, 2020). Exploring the perspectives of immigrants themselves—especially those from marginalized or underrepresented subgroups—would deepen understanding of lived experiences and further inform culturally responsive and equity-focused programming (Ager & Strang, 2008; Chu et al., 2019). Future initiatives should also examine the role of local governance, inter-agency coordination, and funding mechanisms to identify scalable and replicable models for immigrant integration across urban contexts (Benton et al., 2018). By addressing these areas, future work can build on the foundation laid by this study to enhance the inclusivity, responsiveness, and effectiveness of immigrant integration policies and practices.

Study Limitations

Despite the valuable insights generated through this formative evaluation, several limitations must be acknowledged to contextualize the findings and inform future research endeavors.

Limited Sample Size and Representativeness

The study utilized in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 12 purposively selected subject matter SMEs, including service providers and program stakeholders. While this sample provided rich, context-specific insights into the development and implementation of social integration initiatives, the relatively small sample size may constrain the representativeness of findings. As Patton (2015) notes, qualitative inquiry prioritizes depth over breadth; however,

future studies should consider expanding the sample to include a broader range of voices, including frontline practitioners, policy actors, and beneficiaries, to enhance the comprehensiveness and transferability of the results.

Contextual Boundaries and Limited Generalizability

The findings are situated within the socio-political and institutional landscape of New York City, a uniquely resourced and demographically diverse urban setting. As such, the transferability of insights to other contexts—particularly rural areas or municipalities with different governance structures—may be limited (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Comparative studies across various geographic regions and policy environments are recommended to assess the applicability of the identified program components and to develop scalable, adaptable models of immigrant integration.

Temporal Limitations and Lack of Longitudinal Data

The study adopted a cross-sectional design, capturing a snapshot of stakeholder perspectives at a single point in time. Consequently, it does not assess the longitudinal impacts of social integration programming on immigrant outcomes such as psychosocial well-being, economic mobility, or civic engagement. Long-term, longitudinal research is warranted to evaluate the sustainability and evolution of integration outcomes over time, as recommended in implementation science frameworks (Fixsen et al., 2005).

Limited Inclusion of Immigrant Voices

A significant limitation lies in the limited incorporation of direct immigrant experiences into the dataset. While the perspectives of service providers and institutional stakeholders are crucial for understanding systemic implementation challenges, the absence of primary narratives

from immigrant participants restricts the study's ability to fully capture the lived realities and nuanced challenges of integration. Future research should adopt participatory methodologies or community-based approaches to foreground the voices of immigrants in the evaluation and co-design of integration programs (Israel et al., 2017).

Unanswered or Partially Answered Research Questions

Despite generating valuable insights into the design and early implementation of social SI programs, this study surfaced several questions that remain either unanswered or only partially addressed. Future research should aim to investigate these areas to deepen the evidence base and inform more comprehensive and sustainable programmatic interventions.

- **What is the long-term impact of social integration programs on immigrants' socio-economic outcomes?** Although this formative evaluation identified short-term benefits such as increased access to services, improved language skills, and greater awareness of civic structures, it did not assess the longitudinal effects of participation in integration programs. Understanding the enduring impact on employment stability, economic mobility, social participation, and psychological well-being is critical (Ager & Strang, 2008; Phillimore, 2021). Longitudinal studies employing mixed-method designs could provide a more robust evaluation of whether integration efforts translate into sustainable outcomes over time.
- **How does digital accessibility impact immigrant learning and integration?**

The study surfaced concerns about digital divides, especially among newly arrived immigrants with limited technological literacy or access to reliable devices and internet connectivity. While hybrid and remote learning models offer scalability and flexibility, their efficacy remains unevenly distributed (Alencar, 2018). Further research should

investigate whether digital literacy interventions enhance immigrant engagement, learning retention, and access to virtual services and how such tools can be adapted to minimize exclusionary effects across different subpopulations.

- **What role do informal community networks play in social integration?** While formal institutions play a pivotal role in immigrant integration, informal community-based networks—such as ethnic associations, religious institutions, and peer mentorship groups—were identified by stakeholders as crucial for navigating cultural adaptation and accessing resources. However, the study did not quantify the influence of these networks or explore the mechanisms through which they contribute to integration outcomes. Future inquiry should focus on mapping these informal systems and assessing their potential for strategic inclusion in program design and implementation (Chavan & Wilkinson, 2020; Cheung & Phillimore, 2014).

Future Research Directions

To build upon the findings and address the limitations of this formative evaluation, future research should adopt a more comprehensive, longitudinal, and participatory approach to studying immigrant integration. Expanding the scope of inquiry will enable the development of evidence-based, culturally responsive, and sustainable SI programs.

Examine the Heterogeneity of Immigrant Experiences Across Subpopulations

Future studies should investigate the distinct needs of immigrant subgroups, considering variables such as country of origin, age, gender, educational level, migration pathway, and legal status. These factors significantly influence integration trajectories, access to services, and program engagement (Ager & Strang, 2008; Phillimore, 2021). Disaggregating data by subgroup

will enable the tailoring of SI programs to better align with the cultural, educational, and psychosocial characteristics of participants.

Implement Longitudinal Evaluations of Integration Program Outcomes

While this study offers a cross-sectional perspective on the benefits of SI programs, longitudinal research is essential to assess sustained impacts on employment, language acquisition, social participation, and overall well-being. Long-term tracking of program participants will yield insights into the durability of outcomes and inform iterative improvements (Fixsen et al., 2005). Such studies can also help establish causal links between program components and integration success.

Investigate the Role of Digital Technologies in Immigrant Integration

Given the barriers identified around digital access and literacy, future research should evaluate the effectiveness of hybrid learning models, mobile applications, and digital skills training in facilitating integration (Alencar, 2018). Empirical studies examining digital engagement outcomes can guide the development of accessible, inclusive, and technologically adaptive learning platforms for diverse immigrant populations.

Explore Sustainable Funding and Delivery Models

To ensure the scalability and resilience of SI programs, research should examine diverse funding mechanisms, including public-private partnerships, employer-sponsored training, and participant-supported contributions. Evaluating the fiscal sustainability of these models is crucial for integrating initiatives within long-term community development strategies (Cheung & Phillimore, 2014).

Integrate and Evaluate Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Interventions

Recognizing the psychosocial stressors and trauma experienced by many immigrants, future research should assess the incorporation of culturally responsive, trauma-informed mental health interventions within SI programs (Chavan & Wilkinson, 2020). Evaluating these supports will advance the holistic design of integration efforts and address emotional and psychological barriers to adaptation and self-sufficiency.

By addressing these critical research areas, future studies can enhance the responsiveness, effectiveness, and sustainability of integration programming. Employing diverse methodologies—including participatory designs, longitudinal tracking, and subgroup analyses—will ensure that integration strategies remain empirically grounded and aligned with the evolving needs of immigrant communities.

Conclusion

This formative evaluation sought to develop and assess a Social Integration (SI) program specifically tailored to address the transitional needs of newly arrived immigrants in New York City. Recognizing the persistent service gaps encountered by this population, the study aimed to construct a responsive and evidence-informed framework to support immigrants during their critical first year in the United States. By identifying and analyzing key integration barriers—such as language acquisition challenges, cultural adjustment difficulties, and limited access to employment and public services—the research provided a targeted and context-sensitive response to a complex and evolving social issue.

Grounded in sociocultural theory, which emphasizes mediated learning, identity negotiation, and community-based adaptation (Chirkov, 2023; Vygotsky, 1978), the SI program framework was developed using qualitative insights from professional subject matter experts (PSMEs). The resultant program model incorporates core components, including English language development, civic orientation, job readiness training, and navigation of social and healthcare services. These components were strategically designed to enhance both the functional competencies and psychosocial well-being of participants, promoting a sense of empowerment and belonging that is critical for successful integration (Ager & Strang, 2008; Berry, 1997).

The evaluation process further emphasized the significance of program accessibility, cultural responsiveness, and long-term sustainability. Key recommendations emerging from the findings include the adoption of hybrid instructional modalities, flexible delivery schedules, and robust partnerships with local community organizations. Additionally, the study advocates for diversified funding streams, including public-private collaborations and community-based

support models, to secure the program's scalability and longevity (Fix & Capps, 2021; OECD, 2022).

In summary, this capstone project successfully fulfilled its objectives by developing a theoretically grounded, practitioner-informed SI program, accompanied by a set of practical and scalable recommendations for implementation. The findings support the program's potential to reduce systemic barriers, enhance inclusionary practices, and contribute meaningfully to a more equitable social infrastructure for immigrant populations. By addressing critical service gaps and aligning with the lived experiences of immigrants, the proposed program offers a sustainable pathway toward long-term integration—positioning immigrants as active agents and valued contributors to the civic, social, and economic vitality of New York City.

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APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND QUESTIONS

Interview Protocol Introduction

Greetings,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. My name is Jameson Louis, and I am conducting this interview to inform the development of a Social Integration (SI) program aimed at enhancing the social assimilation of newly arrived immigrants in New York City.

This interview will be recorded to ensure accuracy in our notes, and your responses will remain confidential. All recordings and data will be anonymized and securely disposed of after transcription and analysis. Participation is entirely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time without any consequences. If at any point you feel uncomfortable or prefer not to answer a question, please let me know.

The interview is designed to last between 45 minutes and one hour.

Preliminary Questions

1. Are you 18 years of age or older?
2. Do you currently reside in New York City?
3. Have you had any experience working with immigrant populations?

Professional Background

4. How long have you been involved in supporting or working with immigrant communities?
5. In your view, how important is social integration or assimilation for newly arrived immigrants?

Program Development and Curriculum

6. How could a program like SI contribute to the social integration of newly arrived immigrants?
7. What would you identify as three essential topics for inclusion in the curriculum of this program?
8. What do you believe would be an appropriate length for the program's modules?
9. How might the courses within this program be structured to maximize effectiveness?
10. What would you recommend for the frequency of classes and overall duration of the program?

Pedagogical Approach and Methodology

11. Which teaching methods or approaches would be most effective in facilitating the social integration of new immigrants?

Challenges and Barriers

12. What challenges do social workers or human services professionals face in their work with immigrants?
13. What are the key obstacles or barriers that newly arrived immigrants face in achieving social integration, and what solutions would you suggest addressing these?

Program Funding and Sustainability

14. What potential revenue models could support the launch and sustainability of a new SI program?

Closing Question

Is there anything else you would like to discuss that has not been covered but is relevant to this project?

APPENDIX B. THEMATIC ANALYSIS DATA

Theme 1: Social Integration for Immigrants

Key Ideas: Importance of cultural orientation, mutual adaptation, and inclusive programming.

Supporting Quotes:

- P1: "Social integration isn't just about teaching immigrants to fit in; it's about helping them feel like they belong and can contribute to the community."
- P4: "Many immigrants come with rich cultural backgrounds. Programs should incorporate ways to celebrate and preserve those while teaching them about their new environment."

Theme 2: Language Barriers

Key Ideas: English proficiency is foundational; need for tiered language instruction.

Supporting Quotes:

- P2: "Without basic English skills, accessing healthcare, housing, or even asking for directions becomes a daunting challenge."
- P5: "Offering beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels in language courses would cater to varying needs."

Theme 3: Program Structure and Duration

Key Ideas: Need for small-group, flexible, modular programs lasting 6–12 months.

Supporting Quotes:

- P6: "Programs need to be flexible because many immigrants work long hours. Evening or weekend classes are essential."
- P7: "Short modules work well because they focus on one topic at a time, making the information easier to digest."

Theme 4: Employment and Skill Development

Key Ideas: Resume building, job search strategies, and credential recognition.

Supporting Quotes:

- P3: "Teaching skills like how to write a resume or fill out online job applications can make a huge difference."
- P8: "Many immigrants have qualifications from their home countries, but they don't know how to transfer those skills to the U.S. job market."

Theme 5: Psychosocial and Mental Health Needs

Key Ideas: Emotional wellness is essential; need for culturally responsive mental health services.

Supporting Quotes:

- P9: "The stress of leaving family behind and starting over in a new country is often overwhelming. Support groups could help them feel less alone."
- P10: "Mental health needs are often overlooked because the focus is on basic necessities, but they're just as critical for integration."

Theme 6: Funding and Budgeting

Key Ideas: Multi-source funding including public, private, and small participant contributions.

Supporting Quotes:

- P11: "Nonprofits and local businesses can be strong partners, but they often need clear proof of impact before investing."
- P12: "Even a small co-pay from participants can create a sense of ownership and commitment to the program."

Theme 7: Participant Recruitment and Networking

Key Ideas: Community-based recruitment using purposive and snowball sampling.

Supporting Quotes:

- P12: "Word of mouth works best, especially in tight-knit immigrant communities."
- P9: "Partnering with local religious or cultural organizations can help reach people who might not otherwise hear about the program."

Theme 8: Challenges in Program Implementation

Key Ideas: Logistical constraints such as space availability and childcare.

Supporting Quotes:

- P5: "Finding accessible spaces in neighborhoods where immigrants live is a challenge, but libraries or community centers can be great options."
- P7: "Childcare is a big issue. Many immigrants can't attend classes if they don't have someone to watch their children."