

## Module 2: Building the Movement

# Advancing Universal Representation

A Toolkit for Advocates, Organizers,  
Legal Service Providers, and Policymakers

**The movement for universal representation—the idea that every immigrant facing detention and deportation should have the right to a publicly funded lawyer if they cannot afford one—continues to gain significant momentum.**

As a result of local and state campaigns, more than [40 jurisdictions](#) across the country now fund deportation defense programs. With the growing injustices and instability that federal immigration enforcement and the spread of COVID-19 have brought to communities, local and state public investment in deportation defense is needed now more than ever.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to universal representation campaigns, and strategies should be tailored to local circumstances. But there are many lessons to be learned from successful campaigns. This fact sheet provides a summary of insights and tools that are explored in more detail in [Advancing Universal Representation: Module 2—Building the Movement](#) by the Vera Institute of Justice, National Immigration Law Center, and Center for Popular Democracy.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Center for Popular Democracy (CPD), National Immigration Law Center (NILC), and Vera Institute of Justice (Vera), *Advancing Universal Representation: A Toolkit for Advocates, Organizers, Legal Service Providers, and Policymakers* (New York: CPD, NILC, and Vera), <https://www.vera.org/advancing-universal-representation-toolkit>.

## Core components of universal representation campaigns

1. State and local universal representation campaigns advance the principle that every person facing deportation should be represented by a lawyer regardless of income, race, national origin, or history with the criminal legal system.
2. When resources are limited, representation should be prioritized for people who are detained.
3. Campaigns should be prepared to advocate against potential proposed due process exclusions—criteria that make people with certain criminal convictions ineligible to receive representation—and to center racial justice.

## Successful campaigns for universal representation start with campaign plans and diverse coalitions

Campaigns should be grounded in diverse coalitions that are inclusive, intersectional, and led by those directly impacted by detention and the immigration system.

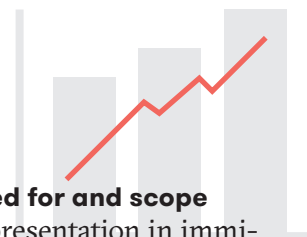
### COALITIONS SHOULD:

- **Develop a clear strategy**, principles, and a campaign plan that acknowledge varied perspectives.
- **Coordinate with intersecting campaigns** working to end immigration detention. Both efforts share the goal of ending unjust mass enforcement and incarceration and can work together to advocate for people in immigration detention.

### Tips

1. Consider framing universal representation not only as an end goal but also as an important step to help achieve the longer-term goal of ending detention.
  2. Understand the broader context and ultimate movement goals, including a federal right to government-funded counsel and an end to civil immigration detention.
- **Build government and legislative champions** to work with the coalition and lead advocacy with their peers.
  - **Assess and understand the various routes to local or state funding**, such as stand-alone budget appropriations; administrative action; and city, county, or state legislative action. The political viability of each route will depend on relevant decision makers, local political support, broader budget priorities, political climate, and timing. This assessment will help inform lobbying and campaign strategies.

## Create a data-driven campaign



- **Use data to explain the need for and scope and importance** of legal representation in immigration court, especially for people in detention. Determine the resources needed for a pilot or a fully funded program.
  - When appropriate, include information about the inhumane conditions faced in detention centers, including loss of liberty and spread of COVID-19, and the critical importance of legal representation to secure release.
- **Empower directly impacted community members** to tell their own stories about their experiences with detention and representation.
- **Use evidence to demonstrate the importance of representation** beyond the courtroom, such as impacts on family members and the broader community.
- **Especially if employing a budget vehicle** for funding, use data and trends on a jurisdiction's budget investments, priorities, and sources of potential over- and under-investment to make the case for investment in immigrant communities.

## Strategies for communications and media advocacy

The full [toolkit](#) and this summary of [toplines](#) provide suggested messaging.

- **Be nimble and flexible** so that communications strategies are responsive to shifts in the media landscape and lobbying strategy.
- **Rely on values-based messaging**: everyone is entitled to due process and to be treated fairly, justly, and with dignity under the law.
- **Keep the focus on people who are directly impacted** and connect individual stories to systemic problems and solutions.
- **Reinforce the natural synergies** between universal representation and other social and racial justice movements. These fights are interconnected.

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