

FindYourAlly Resource Guide

#FINDYOURALLY



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The Higher Education Immigration Legal Services Project is a pioneering initiative designed to bolster the support available to immigrant students and staff within higher education. This project was created in response to the increasing need for comprehensive legal assistance and guidance for immigrant communities in educational institutions.

The project's core mission is to provide accessible, free immigration legal services tailored to the unique challenges that immigrant students and staff encounter. Services include providing information on potential immigration benefits and legal remedies, empowering them with the tools needed to navigate the complex and ever-changing laws and policies affecting their lives.

Rooted in collaboration among educational institutions, non-profit organizations, legal service providers and government bodies, this initiative fosters an environment of support for immigrants pursuing their education and contributing to their communities.

By facilitating access to qualified legal guidance, the project aims to help individuals secure immigration benefits and remedies while instilling confidence and empowerment. It acknowledges the integral role that education plays in the lives of immigrant communities and seeks to remove barriers to their full participation and success within the higher education system.

Partnership with California Department of Social Services

The partnership between the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (Chancellor's Office) and the Foundation for California Community Colleges (FoundationCCC) is a strategic collaboration to enhance resources and services to undocumented students. The partnership leverages each organization's expertise and resources to offer comprehensive support, including legal assistance, educational opportunities and community integration efforts.

At its heart, the collaboration is designed to address barriers that undocumented students often encounter, such as navigating complex immigration laws, securing financial support for their education and accessing sensitive and affordable mental health and legal services.



Background

In response to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) policy's impact, the 2018 Dreamer's Project Report analyzed the current state of support community colleges provide for undocumented students. This analysis, conducted through a comprehensive system-wide survey of 111 colleges and four regional meetings, identifies pressing needs beyond the threat of losing DACA protections. The report also highlights that the top three challenges undocumented students face include access to financial support, a lack of low-cost vetted mental health providers and missing low-cost vetted legal services.

California Budget

Assembly Bill (AB) 1809, the Higher Education Trailer Bill, appropriated \$10 million to execute agreements with qualified organizations to provide immigration legal services and support to individuals on California Community Colleges' (CCC) campuses. This legislative action represents a significant step toward enhancing support for undocumented students within the CCC system by addressing their unique legal needs and facilitating their access to successful academic and professional outcomes. The allocation of these funds demonstrates California's commitment to ensuring community college campuses can offer comprehensive immigration legal services, making higher education more accessible and supportive for all students, regardless of immigration status.

Legal Service Provider Eligibility Criteria

California Department of Social Services selects and funds organizations to provide legal services. Eligibility criteria include:

- *Be an IRS-recognized 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(5) non-profit organization*
- *Have a minimum of three (3) years of experience handling immigration cases*
- *Be recognized and accredited by the Office of Legal Access Program (OLAP) under the U.S. Department of Justice's Executive Office for Immigration Review OR meet the requirements to receive funding from the Trust Fund Program administered by the State Bar of California*
- *Be currently or previously funded through one of the CDSS Immigration Services Programs*

Legal Service Provider Partners as of 2024

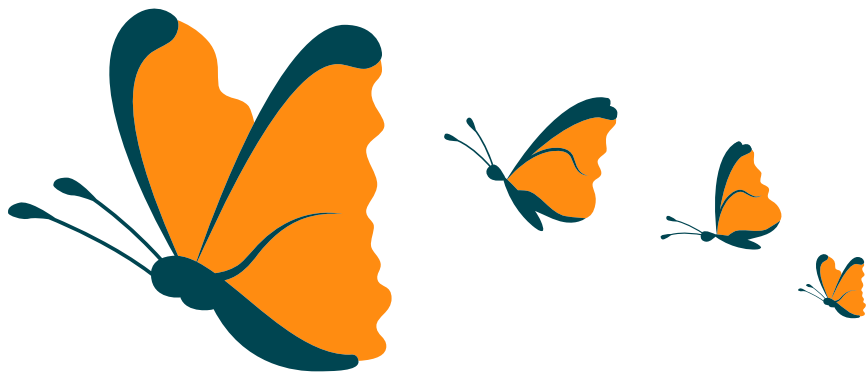
- *Central American Resource Center (CARECEN)*
- *Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County, Inc. (CAB)*
- *Immigration Institute of the Bay Area (IIBA)*
- *Immigrant Legal Defense (ILD)*
- *UFW Foundation*
- *Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)*
- *TODEC Legal Center (TODEC)*
- *East Bay Community Law Center (EBCLC)*
- *Vital Immigrant Defense Advocacy and Services (VIDAS)*
- *Jewish Family Services (JFS)*



Legal Service Provider Structure

Legal service providers can now support all 116 community colleges, with 34 campuses receiving virtual support and 81 campuses receiving both in-person and virtual support. Weekly services include consultations, assistance with immigration applications and other legal support.

Since 2019, both CDSS and FoundationCCC have partnered to implement these services across community colleges. FoundationCCC serves as a liaison between campuses, regional leads and legal service providers to support the delivery of services and address any challenges. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) aligns the roles and expectations between the college campuses and their designated legal service providers.



MOU: Legal Service Provider Roles

- *Maintain a predictable and consistent schedule*
- *Provide virtual or in-person appointments if their college campus allows*
- *Complete all intake and reporting processes (colleges will only assist with designating a room location for in-person consultations and outreach)*
- *All information from the services is kept secure and confidential and will not be shared with the state or colleges.*

MOU: Community College Campus

- *Secure a private space for confidential in-person appointments*
- *Office space should have access to necessary office equipment*
- *Provide parking passes for legal service providers*
- *Conduct outreach to students, faculty and staff to raise awareness of these services and how to access the online portal*

Eligibility

As of 2022, ten legal service providers serve their designated regions portion of all 116 community colleges. This program provides a wide range of free immigration legal services for the California Community Colleges system. To be eligible for free immigration legal services, an individual must be affiliated with a California Community College in one of the following ways:

- *Be a student at a California Community College*
- *Be a staff and/or faculty at a California Community College*
- *Be a dual-enrolled student at a California Community College*
- *Enrolled at an adult education*
- *Enrolled as a non-credit course student*

There is no unit or income requirement, and services can continue regardless of their affiliation period with a California Community College. Unfortunately, due to the current funding, free legal services do not extend to alumni, family members or other college students at this time.

Available Services

This California-funded effort connects trusted legal service providers with individuals needing legal guidance. Services include the following:

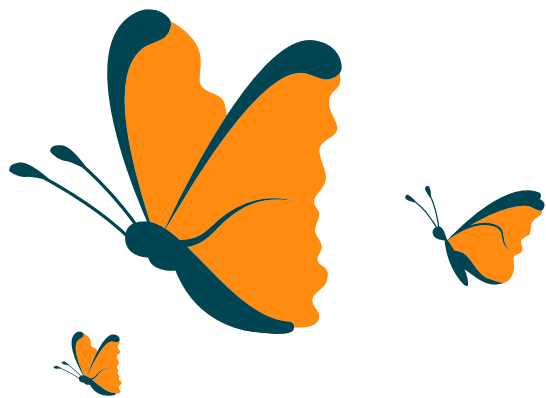
- *General Immigration Legal Consultation*
- *DACA Renewal*
- *Advance Parole*
- *Legal Permanent Residency Renewal*
- *Naturalization/Citizenship*
- *Special Immigration Juvenile Status*
- *Immigration Visa*
- *VAWA*
- *Follow-Up Consultations*
- *And more*

Individuals can receive basic immigration legal assistance to address their unique cases and receive resources to further support their plans. Filing fees for DACA, Naturalization and Advanced Parole are covered for eligible students, subject to funding availability.

Creating an Impact

Since its implementation in 2019, the Higher Education Immigration Legal Services Project has reached over 45,500 individuals through education and outreach and 20,400 individuals through direct legal services. Launched in August 2022, the FindYourAlly website features a centralized scheduling tool to streamline booking an intake appointment. In just the first few months of launch, over 8,000 appointments were booked. The FindYourAlly website remains the primary hub to book intake appointments and access immigration law resources and updates.

FoundationCCC's facilitation of regional meetings has greatly increased the impact of immigration legal services, enabling colleges to learn more about the project, connect with legal service providers and share best outreach practices with neighboring colleges.



Immigration Technical Assistance Partnerships

FoundationCCC is dedicated to providing clear pathways and resources that support undocumented students' educational goals while ensuring campuses remain accessible and equitable, regardless of immigration status. FoundationCCC serves as a liaison and resource to all California Community Colleges for guidance and support.

CDSS also funds the Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC) to provide holistic support to students. This includes producing reliable, accessible content on immigration for students, staff and faculty, as well as hosting webinars to provide updates on immigration policy changes. Resources and webinars are frequently available through the FindYourAlly website and newsletter, covering topics such as Public Charge, DACA, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status and more. Our partnership with the ILRC will continue to focus on assisting students with no status to better support their educational journey.

Best Practices for Outreach and Social Media

For higher education institutions offering immigration legal services, effectively utilizing outreach and social media strategies can significantly enhance visibility and accessibility. Below are tailored best practices for maximizing impact through these channels.



- 1. Educate and Inform:** Use your platforms to share valuable information about immigration laws, policy updates and legal procedures. Simplify complex topics into understandable content such as infographics, short videos and Q&A sessions.
- 2. Community Engagement:** Foster a sense of community among students, staff and faculty by creating spaces for discussions and sharing experiences. Encourage user-generated content to increase engagement and build trust.
- 3. Collaborate with Campus Organizations:** Partner with other campus departments and student organizations to broaden your reach. Co-host events, webinars and social media takeovers to introduce your services to a wider audience.
- 4. User-Friendly Content:** Ensure that all content, especially legal information, is accessible and easy to understand. Include translations and consider the needs of those with different abilities to ensure inclusivity.
- 5. Consistent Branding and Messaging:** Maintain a cohesive visual style and voice across all platforms to increase brand recognition. Ensure messaging aligns with the institution's values and mission.

- 6. Leverage Analytics:** Use social media and website analytics to understand audience behavior and preferences. This data can guide content creation and optimize posting schedules for increased engagement.
- 7. Stay Up-to-Date and Responsive:** The world of immigration law changes rapidly. Keep your audience informed with the latest information and be ready to respond to questions and concerns promptly.
- 8. Peer Support and Testimonials:** Share stories and testimonials from those who have benefited from your services. Peer experiences can be incredibly influential in encouraging others to seek help.
- 9. Digital Accessibility:** Make sure online resources are accessible to people with disabilities by following web accessibility standards. This ensures your outreach efforts reach as broad an audience as possible.
- 10. Privacy and Sensitivity:** Given the sensitive nature of legal matters, especially related to immigration, respect privacy in all communications. Offer private consultation options and secure methods for sharing personal information.

- 11. Create Targeted Campaigns:** Develop outreach campaigns targeting specific student populations or community groups (such as non-traditional students). Tailored messaging to particular demographics can increase relevance and engagement.
- 12. Develop Multilingual Content:** Create content in multiple languages to reach a broader audience, particularly non-native English speakers. This promotes inclusivity and ensures vital information is accessible to all.
- 13. Utilize Live Streaming and Virtual Events:**
Host live streaming sessions and virtual events, like webinars, Q&A sessions and virtual workshops. These events allow for direct interaction and provide immediate value.
- 14. Encourage Feedback and Continuous Improvement:** Regularly solicit feedback from your audience to understand their needs and preferences. Use this input to refine outreach strategies and improve service delivery.

Conclusion

FoundationCCC, in partnership with the Chancellor's Office, serves as a critical support system for undocumented student liaisons, bridging legislative frameworks, financial aid opportunities and the needs of undocumented students navigating their educational paths. By building robust relationships and providing essential resources, the Chancellor's Office, supported by FoundationCCC, strengthens the capacities of liaisons to effectively assist students in accessing legal, financial and emotional support. This strategic alignment not only amplifies the impact of the Higher Education Immigration Legal Services Project but also reinforces the resilience and success of undocumented students within the California Community College system, highlighting an enduring dedication to inclusive education for all.

