



Immigrant Civic Leadership Program

MEET THE 2024-25 COHORT

We are excited to introduce the 2024 Immigrant Civic Leadership Program cohort! These participants will be using New York City as their classroom to explore how they can influence meaningful change and address complex challenges in their work partnering with immigrant communities.



Arlette Cepeda [in](#)

DEPUTY DIRECTOR, LA COLMENA

Arlette Cepeda was born in New York and raised in the Dominican Republic (DR), where she went to school and studied art and music. Currently, she is the Deputy Director of La Colmena Community Job Center working to improve the lives of immigrant day laborers, domestic workers and other low wage workers. As a civic professional, she has worked to develop sustainable partnerships that promote collaboration between students, faculty, staff and community partners to address pressing social issues on and off campus. Cepeda was the former Bonner Program Director and Community Engagement Manager at Wagner College, and former Director of the Center for Leadership and Community Engagement (CLCE). She oversaw student programs and initiatives focused on community engagement.



Bridget Kessler [in](#)

IMMIGRATION PUBLIC DEFENDER & MANAGER

Bridget Kessler is an experienced immigration public defender and manager. With the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project at Brooklyn Defender Services for almost a decade, Bridget represented and supervised representation of hundreds of immigration cases. Bridget has also worked at Mayer Brown LLP and at the Cardozo Law School Immigration Justice Clinic. As a Teaching Fellow at Cardozo, she co-taught a seminar on immigration law and lawyering skills, and supervised law students on immigration casework and community advocacy projects. Bridget speaks Spanish and French. She holds a J.D. from the Washington College of Law and a B.A. in History from Vassar College. She has studied and volunteered internationally, including in Spain, Senegal, and El Salvador.



Chanya Holness [in](#)

SENIOR COORDINATOR, POLICY & ADVOCACY, CHILDREN'S HEALTH FUND

Chanya Holness is the Senior Coordinator, Policy and Advocacy, at Children's Health Fund. CHF leads a national network to bring comprehensive healthcare to children growing up in under-resourced communities and advocates for the health and well-being of all children. As Senior Coordinator, Policy and Advocacy, Chanya conducts research, writes about, and advocates for policies that improve access to healthcare for children growing up in under-resourced communities. In this role, she authors policy briefs and other communications seeking to advance health equity, supports CHF's advocacy agenda, and meets with legislators to advocate for school-based Medicaid expansion, increased access to healthcare and social support for immigrants, and other policies.



Coralie Jean-Francois [in](#)

MANAGER OF POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT, NEW YORK IMMIGRATION COALITION

Coralie manages the New York Immigration Coalition's overall political engagement efforts, which include building strategic partnerships with federal, state, and city legislators and allies and advocating for immigrant communities across the state. As a native Haitian Creole and French speaker, her personal story strongly guides her advocacy work within this role. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in International Political Economy and French & Francophone Studies from Fordham University, where she was able to travel to Paris, France to study the modern-day effects of colonial relationships within francophone countries.



Cynthia Carvajal [in](#)

DIRECTOR FOR UNDOCUMENTED AND IMMIGRANT STUDENTS PROGRAM, CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Cynthia Nayeli Carvajal is the University Director for Undocumented and Immigrant Student Programs at The City University of New York. She works with campus staff, centers, and students to support undocumented students and students categorized under Permanently Residing Under Color of Law (PRUCOL) to access state benefits, financial assistance, and income generating opportunities at higher education institutions. She earned her bachelor's degree at University of California, Los Angeles, her master's in education policy and social Analysis at Teachers College, Columbia University, and her Doctorate in Educational Leadership and Policy at the University of Arizona. Dr. Carvajal is originally from Zapopan Mexico, speaks Spanish fluently and was a 2023 recipient of the Ellis Island Honor Society Beacon Award.



Emily D'Angelica

IMMIGRATION PARALEGAL/DOJ ACCREDITED REPRESENTATIVE, HER JUSTICE

Emily D'Angelica is currently the Department of Justice Accredited Representative/Immigration Paralegal at Her Justice. In her role at Her Justice, Emily works with survivors of gender-based violence and human trafficking both in an in-house capacity through direct representation in affirmative immigration cases. In her role, Emily also helps in facilitating representation for her clients through pro-bono placement with law firms across New York City. Prior to working at Her Justice, Emily taught English in Madrid, Spain, where she lived for two years. Emily is a native New Yorker and received her B.A. in Spanish Language and Literature and Political Science from Skidmore College.



Manqin (Eve) He

SENIOR SUPERVISING CLINICIAN, SANCTUARY FOR FAMILIES

Manqing (Eve) He is the Senior Supervising Clinician at the Anti-Trafficking Initiative with Sanctuary for Families and maintains a private practice as a mental health counselor. She is passionate about working with survivors of gender-based violence, particularly within immigrant communities, and has been providing culturally informed services since 2018. Eve grew up in Mainland China and moved to the US in 2016. She is fluent in English and Mandarin. Eve holds a Master's degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a Bachelor's degree in Business Management from Sun Yat-Sen University.



Gaelle Saint-Louis

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT, CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK CITIZENSHIP NOW!

Gaelle Saint-Louis is an Administrative Assistant at City University of New York (CUNY) Citizenship Now! As one of the two Haitian Creole-speaking staff members, she plays a crucial role in responding to calls from Haitians seeking assistance. She ensures callers are informed about the necessary documents for their appointments. She facilitates the completion and mailing of applications, such as temporary protected status (TPS) or work permits, to USCIS on the same day. Within less than a year, Gaelle was promoted to assist an attorney at York College due to the increased demand for services from recently paroled Haitians. Recently, Gaelle began interpreting and working as a paralegal at the central office, assisting a lawyer with asylum applications for Haitians.



Jeffrey Garcia

DIRECTOR OF FINANCE, OPERATIONS & SPECIAL PROJECTS, DOCUMENTED

Jeff Garcia is the Director of Finance, Operations & Special Projects at Documented, a nonprofit newsroom dedicated to reporting with and for immigrant communities, with products serving the Spanish speaking, Chinese speaking and Caribbean Communities in New York City. At Documented, Jeff leads the development of Finance and Operations while entrusted to build relationships within the social sector to expand their reach. He's previously worked at GiveDirectly, Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors and Goodwill - serving social impact missions for over a decade. A first-gen Dominican and native New Yorker, Jeff's impassioned to support the vibrant immigrant communities and formative spaces that nurtured his entrepreneurial spirit.



Johan Lopez

DIRECTOR OF ADULT AND IMMIGRANT SERVICES, SUNNYSIDE COMMUNITY SERVICES

Johan Lopez, born in the Dominican Republic and raised in Yonkers, New York, has dedicated nearly a decade to working within settlement houses, where he has significantly enhanced services and advocacy for immigrant communities. At SCS, he oversees ESOL programming, case management, immigration legal services, and community engagement. Johan holds a BA in Anthropology from the University of Arizona, an MA in TESOL and an MS in Global Affairs from New York University. His studies in global affairs culminated in the direction and production of a documentary film in Haiti, exploring the experiences of women with domestic violence following the 2010 earthquake. A committed advocate, Johan co-chairs the Advocacy and Justice committee at SCS, persistently promoting social justice and community integration.



Kemberly Gil Gachancipa

MANAGER OF TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, NEW YORK IMMIGRATION COALITION

Kemberly is the Manager of Training and Technical Assistance at the New York Immigration Coalition. Kemberly is a first-generation immigrant from Colombia. Her parents and siblings immigrated to the United States when she was 3 years old. Kemberly's personal experience growing up undocumented (DACAmented) in the Hudson Valley is what fueled her passion and mission to advocate for immigrant rights, including extensive advocacy around DACA/DAPA, Federal and New York State Dream Act, Farm Laborers Fair Labor Practices Act, and the Green Light Campaign. As an organizer and immigration advocate, Kemberly has worked and volunteered with numerous service providers and organizations, including Rural Migrant Ministry Youth Arts Group, Western and Mid-Hudson Worker Justice Center, Alianza Agricola and Western and Mid-Hudson Migrant Education.



Lisha Luo Cai

ADVOCACY COORDINATOR, ASIAN AMERICAN FEDERATION

Previously, Lisha served under Councilmember Carlos Menchaca in New York City Council's 38th District. She joined this team largely due to her vested interest in helping the immigrant community that raised her in Sunset Park. One of her fondest memories working at City Council was helping neighbors apply for the Excluded Workers Fund. Seeing the look of relief and tears of happiness of her tías y tíos after finally being able to receive aid post-covid solidified her aspirations to continue advocating for her immigrant neighbors. It was one of the most important aspects of her work during her time at City Council, and it propelled her to continue her advocacy for the Asian American Pacific Islander Community with the Asian American Federation.



Maya Gurung

SENIOR MANAGER FOR SERVICES, ADHIKAAR

Maya Gurung was born and raised in Nepal. She immigrated to the United States as an international student in 2011. Maya earned her bachelor's degree in International Affairs from Skidmore College. She joined Adhikaar as an intern in 2015, and worked 9 years in different roles in the organization. In her main role, she managed the Casework program for issues ranging from immigration, wage theft, fraud, labor trafficking, and others. She has worked with over 1500 Nepali Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders across the nation in obtaining important information on TPS and troubleshooting their inquiries. She also provides Nepali interpretation during legal consultations and for other government agencies. Currently, she works as a Senior Manager for Services overseeing all direct service programs at Adhikaar.



Nathalie Agudelo

ADULT EDUCATION MANAGER, INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE

Nathalie Agudelo is the Adult Education Manager at the International Rescue Committee's Resettlement, Asylum, and Integration Office in New York City. Nathalie leads a team of administrative and teaching staff who work tirelessly to provide ESL classes, cultural orientation, and workforce development workshops to refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers in New York City. Nathalie has worked with adult and youth migrants for over nine years, providing services and leading programs empowering non-native English speakers. An English learner herself, Nathalie moved to the United States at the age of 12. Nathalie received her BA in International Relations from Syracuse University and her MPA from NYU Wagner Graduate School of Public Policy



Tommy Lee [in](#)

ONA OPPORTUNITY CENTER PROGRAM SUPERVISOR, CHINESE-AMERICAN PLANNING COUNCIL

Tommy is an American-born Chinese based in South Brooklyn, New York. He currently oversees CPC Brooklyn ONA Opportunity Center in Sunset Park. The Opportunity Center provides free immigration services supporting the naturalization process, green card renewals, citizenship classes, legal consultations, among other immigration needs for community members. Prior, he was the Health Educator Supervisor with CPC Community Health Services where he managed and facilitated various culturally competent health education programs and workshops for high-risk youths in Brooklyn and Lower Manhattan. He speaks English and Cantonese, with some conversational Mandarin and Taishanese, and received his undergraduate degree from SUNY University at Buffalo.



Young Kwon [in](#)

LANGUAGE ACCESS SENIOR MANAGER, NYC MAYOR'S OFFICE OF IMMIGRANT AFFAIRS

As the Language Access Senior Manager at the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, Young leads language access monitoring and oversight efforts to ensure all New Yorkers, can access City services and information, regardless of English proficiency. A bilingual, bicultural Korean American, Young gained personal experience from a young age navigating different linguistic and cultural contexts - an experience deepened by her Peace Corps experience in Morocco where she learned Darija (Moroccan Arabic) and Tamazight. She holds a Master of Social Work from Washington University in St. Louis and Bachelor's degrees in International Peace Studies and Strategic Communication from the University of Missouri.