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*SERVICE EMPLOYEES INTERNATIONAL UNION, CTW, CLC*

**“Chasing the Dream -  
Different paths, One shared  
future”**

**SEIU Immigration Engagement  
Video Discussion Guide**



## DISCUSSION GUIDE

*“Chasing the Dream-  
Different paths, One shared future”  
SEIU Immigration Video*

### **SEIU’s POSITION ON IMMIGRATION**

Immigration is a fundamental part of the American story and it is this diversity of cultures and talents that make America great. Since the nation’s inception, people have migrated here to improve their lives—strengthening the U.S. economy and enriching our communities from coast to coast. Unfortunately, while immigration is a fundamental tenant of American life, the U.S. immigration system has long been broken, negatively impacting all Americans. Until we pass comprehensive reform, the absurdities of our current system will continue to drag our economy downward and claim an ever-growing list of victims, including: workers who suffer depressed wages and poor working conditions; families separated from their loved ones; and communities that are degraded by increasingly heavy handed—but ineffective—enforcement efforts.

SEIU believes that America cannot afford to ignore its broken immigration system. It is time for an overhaul to make our immigration policies coincide with our shared goals and values as a nation of opportunity, a nation of immigrants, and a nation of laws. Our immigration problems will not go away until we find a fair and practical way to bring undocumented workers out of the shadows, and create legal channels for workers and their families to come here in the future.

Done together, these reforms will finally restore the rule of law and eliminate an informal labor market that drives down wages and labor protections for all workers. Until we achieve the needed comprehensive reforms, SEIU believes that immigration laws should be interpreted and enforced in a manner that promotes the standard of living of all workers by targeting the most egregious employers who exploit the vulnerable status of many immigrant workers to violate labor, wage and hour, and health and safety laws.

## ABOUT THE VIDEO

*“Chasing the Dream - Different paths, One shared future”* is a 13 minute video created by Service Employees International Union to educate our members on the issue of Immigration.

Five SEIU members of different ethnic backgrounds, who work in different industries, and live in different regions of this country; tell their personal story and share their experience of immigration. The video highlights the journeys of these members who migrated either inside our country or from another country to the US, to chase their dreams. Commonalities emerge as they tell their stories of immigrant struggle through the worker's lens.

The story telling process sheds light on:

- The political, global economic and social reasons why people migrate;
- The similarities between recent immigrants and historic migration of African Americans and other waves of immigrants.
- What it means to live in the shadows of society and be second class citizens and workers, and
- The costs of today's broken immigration system and the benefits to all workers if comprehensive reform is enacted.

## PURPOSE

The video and discussion guide are initial components of a larger immigration engagement program being developed by SEIU. This program represents a union-wide effort to overcome stereotypes and educate members on the issue of immigration. The video's purpose is to promote a healthy and honest dialogue, and open minds about shared benefits of fixing today's broken system. Through the personal narratives of these workers, the video invites members to see the issue of immigration in a different light, and to better understand the union's support for comprehensive reform.

**NOTE:** This discussion guide was created to educate SEIU members who have already been exposed to the issue of immigration through the work of their Locals, and who are most probably ready to become advocates or take action in this issue. A different curriculum is being developed for members who have not been exposed to this issue or who might even hold negative views of immigration.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THIS VIDEO & DISCUSSION GUIDE

*"Chasing the Dream - Different paths, One shared future"* offers a glimpse of how this broken immigration system affects all worker's lives. The stories can inspire people to have deeper dialogue on the issue and can be leveraged to move people to action. This guide provides resources for SEIU staff and members of Locals to take that next step. You can use this video and discussion guide to achieve the following goals:

**Educate members of our union and lead them to advocacy:** The video will help members to understand how the issue affects them and their workplaces, and the need for comprehensive reform. Once they understand the problem and the solution, it can prompt them to act in favor of Immigration reform and become advocates for it.

**Organize members and lead them to advocacy:** The video and discussion can be used to mobilize new members who care about this issue to become advocates for immigration reform. Once they become leaders on immigration reform, they become leaders generally - leaders who will fight for other priority issues agendas well-

**As an advocacy tool:** to educate legislators and other decision makers in your area, about SEIU's position on immigration. By showing the human faces of our broken immigration system—through the stories of immigrant and native-born workers—this video may help cut through the short-sighted partisan politics that has blocked Congress from passing smart reform time and time again.

## WALK IN THE SHOES OF OUR MEMBERS FEATURED MEMBERS' BIOS

**David Mitchell**, SEIU Local 5 member, Public Service Division, Tucson, AZ

David recounts the story of his family who came from England in previous generations to achieve a better life. His grandfather supported his family by work in the mining industry all his life. David was forced to leave his manufacturing job at an all steel equipment company in Aurora, IL when the industrial base started to decline. He migrated to Tucson, AZ where he now works as a social worker. Living close to the border has shaped David's views on immigration. David talks about how passing immigration reform will benefit all workers.

**Micheline Charles**, SEIU Florida Healthcare Union member, Healthcare Division Miami, FL

Micheline came to the U.S. from Haiti to build a better life for her children. Her inspirational story is a powerful example of the perseverance of immigrants who overcome tremendous obstacles to achieve the American dream and contribute to their adopted homeland. She cleaned hotels to support her children and to pay for her studies to become a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA). Through her sacrifices, Micheline was able to put all of her children through college. Later, Micheline's involvement in the union changed her life when she organized her own worksite. Today she organizes new nursing homes, she is a proud U.S. citizen who is active in the civic life of this country, and is a strong leader of her union.

**Phoury Chhun**, SEIU Local 721 member, Public Service Division, Los Angeles, CA

Originally from Phnom Penh, Cambodia, Phoury came to the U.S. in 1982 as a refugee after escaping the Killing Fields in Cambodia. Today Phoury is a county employee who helps others find better jobs and achieve higher education. He is a proud SEIU member and his passion for freedom and social justice has led him to become an advocate of the DREAM Act and immigration reform.

**Victoria Márquez**, SEIU USWW, Property Service Division, Los Angeles, CA

Victoria came to the U.S. to escape civil war in El Salvador. She had to face the tough decision to migrate in order to support her family in El Salvador, including her children who she has not been able to see for more than 15 years. Her life story is one of courage, perseverance and sacrifice. She now works in Los Angeles as a janitor. She has become an active leader in her union and mobilizes other members to pass immigration reform.

**Roy Taylor**, SEIU USWW, Property Service Division, Los Angeles, CA

When he was just 17, Roy and his mother had to leave Fort Worth, TX to escape from the Ku Klux Klan. They moved to Los Angeles where they were able to make a decent living. Roy now works as a ticket seller and is a strong SEIU member. In his narrative, he draws the similarities of his own experience to the ones that immigrants face now, including Victoria's story of separation from her children. He was exposed to the issue of immigration through the work of his union when he participated in the Dreams Across America train, an experience that opened his eyes and heart to the discrimination that immigrants face today and made him an advocate for immigration reform.

## BEFORE THE EVENT

### Tips for the facilitator and/or event planner

Below you will find a planning checklist that we hope will help you create a space that encourages reflection and dialogue.

### *Suggested event agenda and materials*

Ideally your event will be of approximately one hour and a half long. The ideal size of the group for discussion is 15 people. The following is a **recommended flow for the event**:

1. 7 minutes for brief introductions and to set ground rules for discussion
2. 13 minutes to show the video
3. 50 minutes to discuss the video
4. 20 minutes for your call to action (if this is part of your goals)

The **materials required** for this event are:

- A copy of the video
- A TV with DVD player
- Table/s and chairs for your members
- Easel pad
- Markers
- A sign in sheet or a pledge card provide by SEIU International to collect the members' information.

## ***Understand your role as a facilitator***

The facilitator of the event and the discussion is ideally a Local's staff person or a union member who is knowledgeable of this issue. The facilitator's primary job is to establish an encouraging and respectful tone that allows people to explore sensitive issues. As a facilitator you must ensure that the conversation is productive and rewarding without asking people to hide feelings of pain, discomfort or frustration. Immigration is a sensitive topic that many people feel passionate about, so it is important for the facilitator to remain calm and neutral, keep people on track, help the group move towards action and model appropriate interaction.

You might also consider teaming up with another person to co-facilitate, especially a person who is not from your racial or ethnic group. This provides diversity of perspectives, will ease the challenges of room management, and will serve as support when handling contentious issues.

You don't need to be an expert in immigration to facilitate the discussion of this video, but the more you know the more effective you will be at helping the group keep the discussion on track.

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We would like to suggest the following most common **ground rules for discussion for multicultural educational classes and workshops**. These are merely suggestions, so feel free to tweak them to fit your goals:

1. Listen actively -- respect others when they are talking.
2. Speak from your own experience instead of generalizing ("I" instead of "they," "we," and "you").
3. Do not be afraid to respectfully challenge one another by asking questions, but refrain from personal attacks -- focus on ideas.
4. Participate to the fullest of your ability -- community growth depends on the inclusion of every individual voice.
5. Share your own story -- Instead of invalidating somebody else's story with your own spin on their experience, share your own story and experience.
6. The goal is not to agree -- it is about hearing and exploring divergent perspectives. There are no "right" or "wrong" comments or answers.
7. Be conscious of body language and nonverbal responses -- they can be as disrespectful as words.

If you need more background information on this issue of immigration, please contact Maria Robalino, SEIU International, at [maria.robalino@seiu.org](mailto:maria.robalino@seiu.org)

## **Define your goals and audience**

Knowing who your audience is will help you prepare for potential questions or issues that may raise. Factors like geography, age, race, religion can all have an impact on comfort levels, speaking styles and prior knowledge. Be aware of who your group is and try to see the issue through their eyes.

Here are some questions to consider:

- Is this event for potential new members who we want to organize to join our union?
- Is this event for already active members of our union who are progressive on this issue and have been exposed to it? If so, how have they been exposed?
- Do these members know each other?
- Is this training for elected officials?
- Will you host a single event or engage in an ongoing project?
- Do you hope to reach some consensus by the end of the discussion?
- Do you plan to simply disseminate information, educate?
- Do you want to call for a specific action at the end of your event?

***NOTE: We do not recommend this discussion guide if the group you have is of members who have never been exposed to this issue, and who might have a negative vision of immigrants. A separate curriculum is in development for this specific target audience. If you have any questions on this curriculum, please contact Maria Robalino at [maria.robalino@seiu.org](mailto:maria.robalino@seiu.org)***

## **Follow-up**

Plan next steps in advance to help members leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even if the discussion has been difficult. Ideas about the type of actions you can do are: signing up for an internal SEIU immigration campaign, sending a text message to join the national campaign, making phone calls / writing a letter to an elected official, becoming part of an Immigration committee inside your Local, hosting another house event, etc.

Finally it is critical to collect the full information of all your event participants in a sign in sheet, or in a member pledge card that SEIU Intl. can provide at your request. You will need this information for future actions and to be able to identify your potential (new) leaders.

## AT THE EVENT

### **Discussion Questions**

Each section below contains questions that can help you prepare, provide sparks to get a dialogue started, or encourage people to deepen their thinking. However, keep in mind that this is not a textbook. No one is expected to cover all the material in these pages, nor do you need to use discussion prompts in any particular order. Skip over any that seem inappropriate for your event. Let the interests and concerns of your group dictate the flow of the discussion.

### **Conversation starters**

1. Think of someone in your life who immigrated either inside our country or from another country to the U.S. Why did they come here? What hardships has s/he faced as an immigrant in the U.S.?
2. How does this broken immigration system affects your workplace?
3. How does your employer treat immigrant workers in your workplace?
4. What kinds of changes have you observed in your own community and workplace in the past? Who has arrived in your community over the last decade?
5. When people say that the United States is an “immigrant nation,” what does that mean to you?
6. If you migrated to the U.S. from another country, please tell us what is your country of origin like? Share with us the story of how you are chasing your dream.
7. Where are your ancestors from? Why did they migrate to the U.S.?
8. What similarities do you see between the way immigrants have been historically treated in the U.S. and the way they are treated today?
9. How does lack of documentation make immigrant workers vulnerable to exploitation?

### **Walking in the featured member’s shoes**

1. What did you learned from hearing these member stories?
2. Which member story was the most memorable to you? Why?
3. What do these SEIU members have in common? How are they different?
4. What do you think David meant when he said “If we raise standards for folks, it raises standards for everybody”?
5. What would you have done if you were in Victoria’s shoes, living in a war, unable to feed her children? What options do you think she had?
6. Are Victoria and Phouri’s dreams and aspirations different than Roy’s or David’s? If so, how?

7. What barriers keep Victoria from seeing her children? Would you agree with a reform that would allow Victoria's children to come live in the US with her?

### **Thinking about racism and xenophobia**

1. What role does race or racism play in the immigration issue?
2. Is this conflict about class, not race?
3. Historically, have class and race been related in the struggle of workers?
4. Roy compares his family and his struggle with racism and discrimination from the Ku Klux Klan to the struggle immigrants face today. Do you find similarities between these two situations?
5. Have you ever witnessed discriminatory behaviors against immigrant workers in your workplace? If so, please share with us.

### **Considering solutions**

1. In 1921, our union SEIU was founded by immigrant janitors from all over the world. They fought to be heard and included in this country. They fought to attain their American Dream and helped build a strong labor movement. Today our diverse union is 2.2 million members strong. What do you think is the legacy these founding members left us? How can our members now follow in their footsteps and push to make this reform a reality?
2. Everyone knows that fixing our immigration system will help immigrants, but how would it help the rest of us?
  - Would members who aren't immigrants benefit if immigrant workers did not have to be afraid that the boss will call the authorities?
  - Would it be easier for immigrants to complain about bad working conditions?
  - Would it be easier for everyone at the workforce to demand higher wages?
3. If you had the chance, what are the three most important things you would change in our current immigration system?
4. What can the union in your workplace do to bring immigrant and non-immigrant members together?
5. As a union member, what is your role to ease tensions with immigrant workers in your workplace?
6. What is your employer's role to integrate immigrant workers better at the workplace?
7. What could be done to prevent employers from exploiting undocumented workers?
8. Besides the workers themselves, who would benefit from protecting the rights of these workers? How?
9. What might happen to the wages of other workers if undocumented immigrants were granted legal status?

## ***Additional Resources***

SEIU International has prepared a toolkit with important information on this issue. You might find this information helpful while you plan this event. **Please enter the following website to download this toolkit:** <http://www.seiu.org/a/immigration/seiu-immigration-toolkit.php>

In particular, we recommend that you review the piece “common myths and misconceptions of immigrants”. These facts might help you clarify what the reality is on this sometimes controversial issue.

If you have further question, need additional material, want to know how to get your local more engaged in the immigration reform fight, or if you want to give us comments on this document and video, please contact Maria Robalino at [maria.robalino@seiu.org](mailto:maria.robalino@seiu.org)