

The purpose of the Forum of African Immigrant Associations was to encourage networking between African immigrants in the New York City area as well as contact with other governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations working with immigrant populations on issues that are crucial to African immigrants.

The Organization of the Forum of African Immigrant Associations

The Forum was initially conceived by Kim Nichols, the co-executive director of the African Services Committee, and Linda Beck, professor of political science at Barnard College and acting director of the Columbia University Institute of African Studies. Prof. Beck and her colleagues, Prof. Gregory Mann (Columbia University Department History) and Prof. Ousmane Kane (Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs), included a budget for the conference in a grant they received from the Muslims in New York Project, funded by the Ford Foundation through the Middle East Institute at Columbia University. Additional funding was later received from First Data Western Union, with institutional support from the Barnard College Department of Political Science.

After extensive research to identify the more than 150 African immigrant associations in the New York City area, the leaders of these organizations were contacted by mail and encouraged to register for the Forum. All those organizations that responded were included in a [directory](#) and invited to participate in two preparatory meetings held in the Fall 2002.

At the preparatory meetings, an agenda was established that focused on strategies for dealing with the various challenges and concerns of the African immigrant community: capacity building for individual organizations, collaboration among African immigrant associations, networking with other communities and government officials, and transnational activities. Based on recommendations from those who participated in the preparatory meetings, speakers were invited to participate on an initial panel at which they would present their extensive experience in these areas:

- *Margie McHugh, Executive Director, New York Immigration Coalition*
- *Denice Williams, Deputy Director of Community Resource Exchange*
- *Matthew Tollin, New York City Council*
- *Edouard Aho-Glele, UN permanent mission of the republic of Benin*

The panel was to serve as a catalyst for continued discussion in smaller workshops that focused on a particular strategy, facilitated by individuals with backgrounds that would permit them to be resource people while encouraging the participation of all participants in a productive discussion that would lead to substantive outcomes:

- *Scott Worley, School of Public Health, Columbia University*
- *Aron Goldman, Policy Development*
- *Amy Taylor, NYC Mayor's Office for Immigrant Affairs*
- *Jomai Faye, Senegalese Activist*

In addition, **Mr. Mark Handelman, the president of New York Association of New Americans**, was invited to give the keynote speech at lunch. All African immigrant associations, whether they responded to the initial mailing or not, were contacted by mail and invited to participate in the Forum. Over 20 organizations were represented along with 40-odd observers from various academic and non-government institutions.