

**Forum of African Immigrant Associations:**  
**Workshop and Strategies**  
**Networking With Political Officials and Other Communities**

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**Opening Comments from Amy Taylor:**

To begin with, Ms. Taylor informed participants that the Immigrant Services Office in Mayor's Office has been in existence for a number of years. Participants in the workshop were alerted to the fact that the office could not only help them with access to political officials, check-up on pending INS applications but also manages language banks for immigrants. Ms. Taylor also stressed that the Office was committed to building bridges between City government and immigrant communities. To facilitate this, Ms. Taylor spoke of the public weekly meetings held by the Immigrant Services Office. Perhaps cognizant that one barrier to networking with political officials could lack of knowledge of the levels of government open to immigrants associations, Ms. Taylor alerted participants in the workshop of the following possible contacts: Borough Presidents, City Council Members, Mayor's Office, and State level representatives. With respect other communities Ms. Taylor suggested unions for possible networking. The argument here was that the union's ability to turn-out a lot of people for a course would give immigrant associations greater leverage in pushing their agenda through the political process.

After her introductory remarks, Ms. Taylor directed the discussion to examples of networking. To give participants in the workshop an example of how networking with political officials and other communities can move an issue forward, Ms. Taylor spoke of the initiative to get New York to fund the English as a Second Language. Ms. Taylor spoke of how through networking the initiative was able to draw various studies that demonstrated that New York only met 5% of its ESL demand.

The discussion that followed Ms. Taylor's comments picked-up on some of the issues raised by participants in the Panel on Strategies. For instance, participants wanted to know if the Office for Immigrant Affairs could help immigrant associations with office space or meeting facilities for groups. It was clear from the response given that the office was only in the position to help knew groups get city contracts for services they need provided. Mark Handelman of NYANA (New York Association of New Americans) joined the discussion to underscore that for many immigrant associations getting resources to get established is always key. He responded to participants by informing them that NYANA sometimes offers space to new groups. More importantly however, Mr. Handelman suggested that groups get in touch with larger associations to see if they have space to spare. This comment only further highlighted the importance of collaboration.

Continuing to reflect the concern participants have about day-to-day issues, a question was asked about street vendors and the difficulty of getting permits. Specifically, participants wanted to know "how people get permits?" Participants were informed that there is someone at the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs who handles this. A second question that seemed to be of interest to participants was whether were any grants for cultural programming from the City Council.