

Rita Fernandez

Rita was most recently the Director of the Immigration Policy Project for UnidosUS, the largest Latino civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States. In this capacity, she oversees the organization's immigration policy priorities and advocacy efforts with the U.S. Congress, and among local and state stakeholders.

Prior to joining UnidosUS, Rita worked for the City of San Diego in various roles. Most recently, she served as Executive Director of the City of San Diego's Office of Immigrant Affairs, an office created by Mayor Todd Gloria to advance San Diego's 'Welcoming SD' initiative. She also served as Director of Global Affairs for Mayor Gloria, overseeing subnational diplomacy priorities, fostering San Diego's ties with Sister Cities, and strengthening relationships with the government of Mexico and the neighboring City of Tijuana. In 2019, she was appointed by Mayor Kevin Faulconer to serve as the first Immigrant Affairs Manager in the city's history.

Rita also worked in the office of Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti as Associate Director of Immigrant Affairs where she helped advance major programs and initiatives to support immigrant and refugee communities in Los Angeles. She served as a key advisor on Mayor Garcetti's team helping guide his priorities on migration and shaping city policies impacting immigrants in the region.

She has worked for Members of Congress representing the San Diego delegation. During her time in the Washington, D.C. office of Rep. Juan Vargas (CA-51), she worked closely on immigration and border issues as a press aide and special assistant. She also worked as Administrative Assistant in the office of Rep. Susan Davis.

Rita has also done consulting work with Impact Strategies Inc. as a Project Director and Consultant, conducting a comprehensive five-sector landscape analysis to assess the dynamics between the child welfare system and immigration, specifically examining impacts on immigrant children and their families.